## WRITERS IN EXILE: A CONFERENCE OF SOVIET AND EUROPEAN DISSIDENTS

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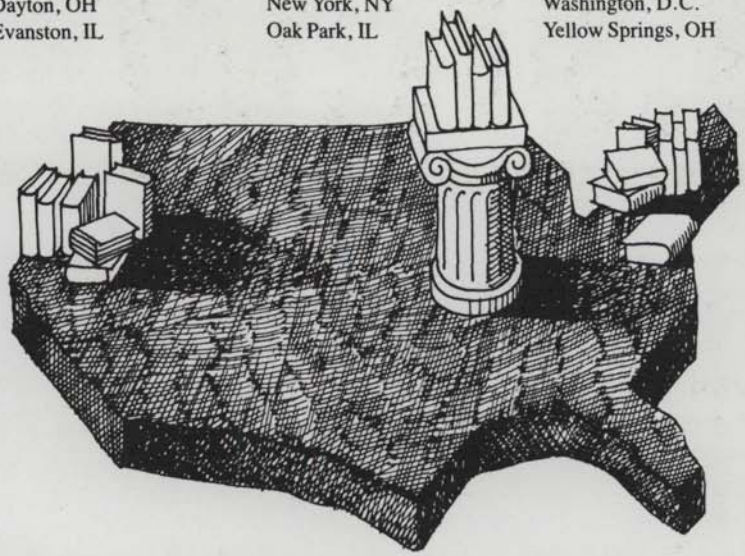

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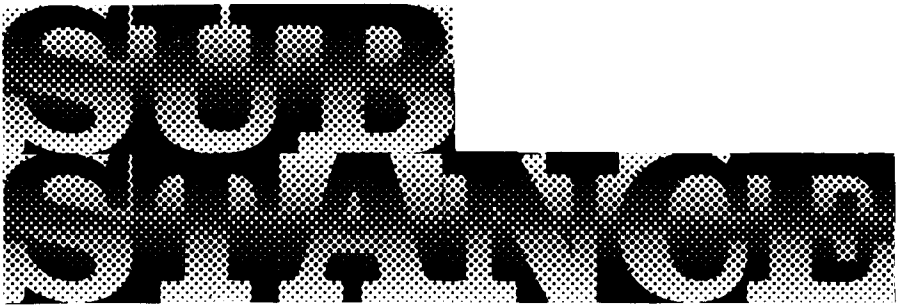


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# WRITERS IN EXILE:

## A Conference of Soviet and East European Dissidents

### The Writer and His Past

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: This conference is sponsored by *Partisan Review* with the cooperation of Boston University. You are looking at a considerable part of Soviet literature and culture, and to some extent, at the literature and culture of the East European countries as well. It has been observed that Russian literature and culture no longer exist solely within the Soviet Union; they exist to a considerable extent outside. That's an amazing historic phenomenon, and to my knowledge it happened only once before in our history: Nazi Germany also exported its literature and its culture, so that during the Nazi regime it really existed only outside of Germany. Since then some German writers and artists have returned home. I hope we can look forward to some such event in the history of the Soviet Union.

The moderator of this panel will be Professor Bell of Harvard University.

DANIEL BELL: One might say that *Partisan Review* is a landmark both in the English and the Russian sense of the term, given the fact that it is probably the oldest magazine of a cultural kind in this country. Perhaps people who came out of the avant-garde don't like to think of themselves as the oldest, but *Partisan Review* is, and it's one of the luminaries. I'm very pleased to be here.

I would like to make a few remarks, perhaps to set the tone of some of the issues we would like to discuss at this session. The experience of being violently uprooted and emigrating to another

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Editor's Note: Writers in Exile: A Conference of Soviet and East European Dissidents, was held on May 7 and 8, 1982, at Boston University. The conference was made possible by grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Boston University Humanities Foundation, the Massachusetts Foundation for Humanities and Public Policy, and by the contributions of several private donors. Additional sessions of the conference will be published in subsequent issues of *Partisan Review*. The Russian texts were translated by John Glad, Director, Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies at the Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars. Edith Kurzweil was responsible for the organization of the conference.

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country is one of the painful experiences of the age. Karl Marx, who lived for sixty-five years, spent more than thirty-seven years of his adult life in exile. And one can say, perhaps wryly, that the Communists want their best minds to live the way Marx did.

Millions of people emigrate and change the pattern of their lives, but most of them, at least the fortunate ones, are able to do so voluntarily and for voluntary reasons. For a writer, the ability to travel is necessary for broadening his horizons. Among American writers, people like Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Mark Twain, Stephen Crane, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway all spent significant parts of their lives in travel and abroad, but they could and did come home. Home is an essential fact for being a writer—not only the physical surroundings and details of ordinary life, but of course the language and the voices and the streets and the air, and when one is not at home, it creates tremendous problems.

Today, as my colleague William Phillips has observed, almost the entire Russian and even Czech culture (that part which is not in prison), a large part of the Hungarian culture, and a significant part of the Polish culture live in exile. And our theme here is: What does this mean for the writer?

If we turn to the Russian writer, his problem is significantly different from the problem of those writers from Eastern Europe. The years of Stalinism beginning in 1929 created a huge pressure chamber that has lasted more than fifty years and has stamped out an extraordinary, vibrant, and independent culture. There's a very curious paradox of Soviet Marxism: it believes in history with a capital *H*, but not in memory.

The question is: Whose past now becomes more relevant? We've had perhaps three emigrations. For the Russian writer, there were of course the great nineteenth-century emigrations of Herzen, of Turgenev. There was a second emigration, less well-known but in its own way significant: after the Revolution people like Berdiaev, Ivan Bunin, Mark Aldanov, Lev Shestov all lived and worked in exile, most of them in Paris, although Aldanov came to this country after World War II. Today, the people gathered here represent the third emigration. The question is: To whom do they relate?

There is also, however, the great fruit of Russian experi-

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mentalism during the period from 1910 to 1930 or 1935—the great experimentalism in the theater of Vakhtangov and Meyerhold and Tairov, of people like Tatlin, El Lissitsky, Rodchenko. One almost weeps when one hears the roll call of people like Blok, Esenin, Mayakovsky, Pasternak, Bell.

I now ask Mr. Vassily Aksyonov to address this question. Mr. Aksyonov is one of the great younger Russian writers. He is fortunate in another sense; he is the son of a woman who is one of the most extraordinary persons both in Russian literature and in Russian history: Evgenia Ginsberg, whose two books about the nature of the whirlwind represent one of the great landmarks itself of twentieth-century writing. Mr. Aksyonov.

VASSILY AKSYONOV: It seems I was once a young writer and I am still a young writer. Some are so lucky to be ever-green writers.

I have decided to entitle my speech "Gratitude to Our Former Rulers." Thinking of my own destiny as a writer and of my own past, I feel I should confess my feelings of gratitude to the Communist rulers of my country. First of all, I thank them for the frustration they suffered after the death of their idols in 1953. For a period of fifteen years after that time, they could not find a new style. Thanks to this frustration, my generation had the opportunity to express itself in literature, in art, and even in politics. While they discussed questions like the "cult of personality" and its aftermath, "socialism with or without a human face"—or with or without human maxims—socialist realism with shores or without, etc., we were writing books, sculpting, painting, playing jazz. The post-Stalin Communists were so diffident that they saw, even in the armed crackdown in Budapest, an "overbending of a stick,"—the dreadful consequences of the personality cult that could have been avoided if . . . if . . . if. . . . Not to mention Krushchev's hooligan attack on young literature and art in 1963. That was a definite mistake of the so-called voluntaristic leadership, accused the collective wisdom of our Party. Even in 1966, when Siniavsky and Daniel were on trial, some of the rulers were uncertain about what they were doing.

They were frustrated even more after the unexpected protests by many of the new intelligentsia. The frustration was so deep that some of the rulers were reluctant to see the KGB as the best tutor for writers. The KGB of that time was rather timid in its relationship with literary circles. The criminal persecution of dis-

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obedient authors has generally been regarded as the survival of the old style rather than the brilliant discovery of contemporary life, the new splendor of the so-called highly advanced and ripe socialism.

In other words, I would thank them for the happiness I experienced. I experienced this fantastic state of mind, this happiness, taking part in the movement of the Soviet sixties. I was twice as happy as long as this unbelievable period of Soviet life coincided with my youth. I belonged to a generation born in the thirties, on the crest of revolutionary violence, when in Russia and Germany two kinds of socialism were simultaneously blooming. Should I thank and praise those "Cheka" officers who had taken my parents to jail and put me in an orphanage? Probably I should, because otherwise I would have run the risk of becoming one of them—either a ruler or a watchdog. After the great purges of the thirties, we—a thoroughly edited generation—were supposed to become the ideal slaves, but thanks to this loss of style, the result of the editing turned out to be the opposite of what had been expected.

In the sixties, the writers of our generation became known as the new voices of Russia. We looked to world literature, already mesmerized and inspired by the new ideas, new sounds, new smells, and all that jazz of the renaissance. Sure, it was a timid and feeble one, but nonetheless a renaissance indeed. And those who lived during those exciting periods of human history might know the touch of Fortune's wing. I read in an article by a surprisingly young Moscow writer that during the sixties he got up every morning with a strong feeling of the growing feast—a feeling of freedom broadening and deepening one's perception of independence. Formerly, it went without saying that a Soviet writer had to develop a sort of deviant conscience; to submit to the countless Soviet prejudices as if it were necessarily a big handicap for him to live in the ethical sphere; to omit any painful questions; to be an inspiring liar for the sake of the great idea. Our generation entered the literary stage with a vague perception of honesty, and—what is probably more important—without a clearly formulated aesthetic, without which you can hardly achieve a full scale of expression of anything, including honesty.

It sounds paradoxical, but while the years were passing by and the writers were getting older, any possibility for compromise

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was shrinking. And the feeling of freedom was also growing. Maturity brought about more courage and more determination. From time to time, it even seemed that we would overcome. I thank our watchdogs for their weakness in those times, which produced such happy false feelings. For surely our life has consisted of a mixture of false and true feelings, which is, believe me, the great fertilizer of poetry and prose. Alas, our generation has left behind a horrible memory of terror and Gulag, and it is hard to sustain the carnival mood of renaissance with a memory like this. Alexander Blok has written:

> Those who were born during the deaf times
> fail to recall their path.
> We, the children of Russia's horror years,
> cannot forget anything.

The contraposition of "the deaf times" and "the horror years" implies that by *deaf,* the poet meant the quiet, peaceful years. Without memory, literature is dead. "Old wounds are hidden treasures," Yuri Trifonov once said. From this perspective, I would dare say that Russia is not a bad country for a writer: we've never suffered from a surplus of tranquility. There is definitely a lack of "deaf times," and a good deal of wounds and of "horror years." So, once again, we have sufficient reason to thank our rulers.

One can hardly regard that false renaissance period as deaf. Nevertheless, our memory has not been totally awakened. I have often asked myself, Why was I so reluctant for so long to put my memory into motion? Why did I not recall the landscape of Magadan, with its watchtowers, the thousands of prisoners under escort, my mother's face in the window of the KGB car . . . ? I used to lull myself: "It's not yet time for recollections like these." And apparently it wasn't. Obviously I had a sort of subconscious feeling that this gloomy memory would be out of place in our village feast; it could damage the carnival mood of our generation.

The end of this Soviet serenity has an exact date: August 21, 1968, the night of The Fraternal Assistance for our Czechoslovakian brothers. That was a turning point for post-Stalin Communists; they reached the end of their search for a new style. That was also a great moment for us. The invasion brought

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about some advantages for the writers: it killed our naive illusions and Don Quixotic dreams, and, at the same time, it renewed our memory, revived those old hidden wounds which were necessary for the next step in our writing. Needless to say, not all writers have dared to take the next step, and those who did not extended their self-indulgence to a recipe for supreme happiness.

Not very long ago, I watched on Moscow TV a ceremony honoring some talented writers and artists with highly distinguished state awards, formerly known as the Stalin awards. I was struck by a statement made by one of those honored, a former friend of mine: "The supreme happiness for any creative man is reached when his intentions coincide with the intentions of his government." This is a really fresh, fruitful idea, isn't it? If you tried to develop it from different positions, you would find, surprisingly, a utopian core. But eventually you would get tangled up in a number of contradictions. I really thank the rulers of my country for making their intentions and deeds so ugly that I never had any desire to make my intentions coincide with theirs. I used to consider myself a Western type of writer—a storyteller, an entertainer, a belle-lettrist rather than a master of thoughts in traditional Russian fashion. Thanks to their bloodthirsty slogan—"Those who are not with us are against us"—many authors became more Russian in regard to the "civic emotions."

What about politics? Unfortunately, you cannot avoid it if you are a Russian writer. Whatever we write turns into politics—if it is not "with them." On the other hand, thanks to their hyperbolic stupidity, it becomes advantageous to develop that wonderful style of "the empty page." Here is one of the newest jokes from Moscow, via satellite: One fellow decided to spread anti-Communist leaflets in Moscow. But, when he was captured by the KGB agents, the leaflets turned out to be empty. "Why didn't you put down anything in your leaflet?" he was asked by an interrogator. "What for?" he shrugged. "Everybody knows everything."

By the beginning of the seventies, this period of frustration was over; a new style of leadership was found. It was named "the highly developed and ripe socialist society." And once again we had an occasion for more thanksgiving. Thank you for crossing *t*'s and dotting *i*'s, dear comrades. We used to think that your favorite activity was tightening screws; now we realize that you are

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really working for the future. Once and for all we realize that you mean business when you talk about "the creation of a new man." Thanks to your contemporary style, everyone can easily recognize the face of this new creature.

Our writers used to go to distant lands looking for new adventures. Under the Communists' sponsorship, literature itself has turned into a dangerous adventure—a sort of conspiracy, a matter of smuggling. So if you've heard something about the Russian Connection, please keep in mind that it concerns books rather than drugs. If one were to read a mere chronology of the so-called *Metropol* Affair, he would be carried away as if by a thriller. From time to time, the rulers fight literature fiercely, as though the whole existence of their system were at stake. Whether we should thank them for this parochial overestimation of literature or not. . . . Anyway, I indulged myself by talking with high-ranking officers who came to warn me about one of my books. I thank them for so many privileges, as well as for kicking me out of their society and depriving me of their so-called citizenship.

One can imagine that the process of turning from an internal émigré into an external one is pretty natural in these days of wild metamorphoses. After emigration, you find yourself in a deafening silence, as if you had left behind a sound barrier in a jet flight. At first you feel discharged, but on second thought, you may suppose that emigration came to you on time. At last you are out of this damn Marxist ideological debauchery, as well as out of your indecent, clumsy struggle against it. For the first time in your life, you are able to feel the sweet temptation of being out of any recruitment—an adventure of solitude, the life of a vagrant juggler. Alas, you are not young anymore! But even so, from time to time at least, you can listen to the tune of that music you always dreamed of. So once again, I would like to express my profound gratitude to my former rulers, as well as to Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Krushchev, and Brezhnev, for helping me to become a writer. I have never desired any other destiny.

DANIEL BELL: Thank you Mr. Aksyonov.

Many of us have had the experience of meeting a writer in his books or essays before we meet him in person. I met Mr. Nekrasov many years ago in a remarkable story he once wrote. It was about a trip to the United States, and in the story the narra-

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tor was with a group under the supervision of a guide, and he hoped to break away from this guide. He was able to break away, and went uptown to a bar in New York, where he sat and talked to ordinary people. And he thought, Isn't it wonderful I'm able to do this! And then he reported: Actually, this is only a story; it did not happen.

But now he is here. Mr. Viktor Nekrasov.

VIKTOR NEKRASOV: When you fly across the entire globe, well, not the whole globe, but half, in order to tell someone about today's Russian, Soviet literature, you always end up in somewhat of a quandary. In the first place, who will your listeners be? Japanese and New Zealand students? Or Shanghai émigrés living in Australia, or in Canada? Former followers of the Ukrainian nationalist Petlyura? Or maybe the newcomers, and among them literary critics, who know as well as you do all the complexities of the life of a Soviet writer?

And the second thing. You yourself have long been torn away from your native soil—I, for example, for seven and a half years. You don't know the latest gossip from the House of Writers, or about who died yesterday or was named "Hero of Socialist Labor."

In one of my appearances in Japan, I talked of the vitality of Russian literature, about how even during all the terrors and the Stalins, Pasternak and Bulgakov and Platonov existed, and were even published, and now Rasputin and Abramov are receiving State prizes. And after what I felt was such a convincing speech, a young Japanese man came up to me and said, "You are contradicting yourself. You say that it's very difficult for the Soviet writer to work in such conditions, and then you cite examples of writers who speak the truth and even receive prizes for it."

And I realized that I had made an error. Or rather, gotten off the track. Carried away by the Abramovs and Rasputins, I had hardly said anything about those who actually govern the literary process—all the Felix Kuznetsovs, Mikhail Alekseevs, Aleksandr Chakovskys, Sergei Mikhalkovs, Georgi Markovs—who fill the book shelves and libraries with their many volumes and the pages of the *Literary Gazette* with monotonous cud about the struggle of the vanguard with the unenlightened, or with eulogies directed to a new-fledged laureate of the Lenin prize; about how it's important for us men of letters to learn adherence to principle, depth of penetration, breadth of scope from them.

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But, if you talk of Soviet literature, then it differs from other literatures by the fact that the amplitude of its fluctuations is broader than anywhere else, and its poles are at a distance from each other such as you won't find in either contemporary French or German literature. *Pravda* and *Literaturka,* the unimaginably broad *Novy Mir,* the Parisian *Kontinent* and the Moscow *Ogonyek, Moskva-Petushki,* or *Chonkin,* or A. Chakovsky's *Blokade,* or the next opus of Yulian Semenov—all these taken together, so dissimilar and even hostile to each other, are called Russian literature of the second half of the twentieth century. And in this dissimilarity, hostility, and simultaneity of existence is contained a uniqueness.

Excuse me, they will say, but in the first half of the century there was both dissimilarity and hostility. On the one hand, the initiators: Gorky, Mayakovsky, Sholokhov; after them the Fadeevs, Nikolay Ostrovsky, Marietta Shaginyan. And on the other hand Bunin, Kuprin, Teffi, Sasha Cherny, Merezhkovsky, Gippius, Nabokov, finally . . .

Yes, true, that was so. Two worlds. But between them was a wall, insurmountable.

We knew nothing or very little about each other. We—in any case, those who lived on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain—we lived in a tightly soldered tin can. About Bunin we heard things here and there, something about the Nobel Prize; about Kuprin, that he came to die in Russia. But about Nabokov? That he wrote a certain very indecent *Lolita,* and that's all. About Mark Aldanov, a wonderful, serious writer, I learned, for example, only after I had come to Paris.

I can't help but recall a certain shameful incident from my biography, about which, incidentally, I wrote some twenty years ago, and which, by some miracle, was published. This happened in 1956 or 1957, in Leningrad. Alberto Moravia had arrived, already famous in Italy, while only just published in Russia. We were invited to spend an evening with him, to talk on some "progressive" themes. We met in the Hotel Europe for a cup of tea. (No vodka, for God's sake!) The participants were representatives of the vanguard, fairly liberal (*Novy Mir,* understand!) Soviet literature. The tedium went on for an hour and a half. We knew a little something of Italian neorealism and had just read a few of Moravia's short stories, while he knew, I believe, nothing about us. Finally, in order somehow to bolster the foundering

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conversation, he asked us what we thought of Kafka. There was a painful pause, and then one of us, I'm afraid it was I, asked: "About what?"

About what! And this was in 1956 or 1957. After Stalin, during the "thaw."

I am citing all this to show how we were cut off from everything. Two worlds, side by side, and we knew nothing of one another. We heard of these things only when we could pick up the voice of the late BBC commentator, Anatoly Maksimovitch Goldberg.

The radio—BBC, Voice of America, German Wave, Radio Liberty—this is what the Soviet man cannot live without. In Berlin they erected a terrible, shameful wall that is always being improved. For more than twenty years now it has divided two worlds, but it didn't succeed in severing contacts, intercommunication, mutual penetration, mutual interest, curiosity, attraction for one another.

We who live here know less, of course, than we would like, but still we know about much that goes on behind this Berlin Wall, sometimes more than those who live on the other side (about Afghanistan and Poland, for example), and those who live there come here at times, talk about things, ask questions; sometimes something is explained, they manage to read something of "ours," hear something on the "slanderous" radio through all the jamming. No, communications have not been severed. They check what you take across the border—what books, journals, manuscripts—but they can't sever communications. The main thing is mutual interest, mutual attraction.

A much more serious question: What do we write about? Who are our readers? To whom do we address ourselves?

In the Soviet Union, of course, our reading audience is the largest, the most demanding and captious, a fact to which we writers are eternally indebted. In the West the picture is different. The French or German readers (and therefore the publishers) are not so concerned with our Russian problems, and the Russian readers can be counted on the fingers of one hand.

But we want to write. From each of us there bursts out: I can't remain silent!

Oh, how difficult it was for us to write at home. Everthing is prohibited. You can't drink, can't love, can't talk about the

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very things with which we tire each other in our kitchens for entire evenings. There is no trace of unrestrained drunkenness—only separate, untypical bouts; drug addiction, all the more rare. Only salesgirls and warehouse managers steal. No one higher up than a building superintendent takes bribes. A Communist might take the wrong step occasionally, but he must immediately be taken by the hand and put back on the right path.

I remember—true, this was a long time ago, in 1954—how the whole editorial board of *Novy Mir*, headed by Tvardovsky himself, banished vodka from my novella *In My Home Town*. (The latest anti-alcoholic campaign was just under way.) "What is this, they're already drinking on the first page?" complained Tvardovsky, who himself was far from an enemy of this sort of thing. "They can't say two words without a half liter!" And by his editorial command (I fought like a lion, but what can you do, being one against everyone else?), half liters turned into quarter liters, quarter liters into small glasses, small glasses into mugs of beer . . .

It all ended, true, after two hours with Tvardovsky sighing heavily and saying, "And now let's go down to the bar for a bit to drink. I'm exhausted."

And so, in struggles such as this, or even worse, in the ruses, evasions, reticence, hints between the lines, allusions, deceptions—taking all the appearances of a circus tight-rope walk or of military strategy, surrendering some secondary positions in order to seize higher ground—we chased after that firebird known as Truth.

Oh, how we envied the Hemingways and Remarques, our idols in those days. They wrote about what they wanted, cursed whom they wanted, and drank what they wanted, and in any quantity. We couldn't even dream of that.

When I say "we," I mean that portion of writers (I can't say the greater or smaller, but at any rate, a definite portion of writers) for whom Russian literature of the nineteenth century was a sort of model, who did not chase after titles and decorations, didn't drink with the Gribachevs and Sofronovs, but still wanted to be published by the Soviet Writer publishing house and, hopefully, with a decent edition. We didn't write things we knew would not get any farther than the desk drawer; that was something I did only toward the end. We didn't send our work abroad; at general

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meetings where someone was getting a beating, we tried to restrain ourselves as much as possible (this was considered a certain form of heroism); but we paid our Party membership dues on time, subscribed to *Pravda* and raised our political awareness, pretending that at home in the evenings we pored over the works of the classics of Marxism. (I, for example, for five years in a row, when asked by the Party bosses what I was working on, answered without lifting a brow: "Engels about war," never once in my life having read a single line of Engels.) No, we were no dissidents. They appeared later.

True, sometimes we signed letters of protest, were delighted with the conduct of Siniavsky and Daniel at the trial, but more than anything we wanted to be published, to be read. And each in his own way carried to this audience his own truth. And if things didn't work out quite so well with the truth, then we tried not to tell too many lies, to write for children, for the young, about safe figures such as Przhevalsky, Tsiolkovsky, or Miklukho-Maklay.

I have seen here on television Aleksandr Borisovich Chakovsky, editor of the *Literary Gazette,* and Viktor Grigoryevich Afanasyev, editor of *Pravda.* It's embarrassing to watch. They wriggle, extricate themselves, try to convince everyone that there's no anti-Semitism in the country: "I'm a Jew, and I'm the chief editor of the *Literary Gazette!*" Chakovsky gives a broad, false-toothed smile. Take it or leave it.

No, something is rotten in this Denmark, this Union of free republics. . . . By the way, things are not particularly good here, either. But we'll put politics aside, it's too complicated. We shall talk only of literature, of Russian literature.

Have I answered the question which I myself posed? What to write about? For whom? To whom should we address ourselves—we who have acquired freedom and are now able to write the whole truth? The dream of a lifetime, the pinnacle of all desires. . . .

And the OVIRs, customs, parting embraces, all this is already behind you. You no longer depend on Valechka Karpova in the Soviet Writer publishing house, and Comrade Perminova, Chairperson of the District Committee's Party Commission, can't ask you any more questions such as, "When did you read Lenin last? I can tell from your conduct that you haven't turned

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to Vladimir Ilyich for advice for a long time. I, for example, when things get tough, go to him right away for advice."

So sit down and tell about all this. How they expelled you. How for forty-eight hours nine polite young men rummaged through your books, manuscripts, how they packed them all in sacks, sealed them with wax, and, tossing them over their shoulders, vanished into the impenetrable, stormy night. How you were summoned afterward to the KGB by General Tretyak, who even offered you Duchess Flor cigarettes and, knowing how you loved the Crimean resort town Koktebel, cunningly and slyly suggested going there, "to concentrate, to think things over, take pen in hand, and then our comrade will go there and. . . . You will help us immensely, both us and yourself. . . . By the way, what's the hold-up with your one-volume edition?"

And now, here you are in Paris. And there is no Valechka Karpova, Comrade Perminova, General Tretyak . . . Sit down and write. About everything.

I sat down and wrote. And even published. And it's possible that someone in the Soviet Union read or heard about it on Radio Liberty or *Deutsche Welle.* And a Frenchman also read it. I gave a copy of my book to my doctor, to the head of the Paris prefecture, to the barber, to a likeable Moroccan from whom I buy oranges in the morning. In some papers there appeared totally positive reviews, even in the respectable *Le Monde,* as well as a not particularly good one, but, just the same, a check for all this was deposited into my bank account!

Did I get my way? You write what you want, and about what you want—expose, brand, pillory. But where are the circles from the stone you've thrown into the quiet pond? They're there, you say? No, let's tell the truth, there aren't many circles, although the stone was truly heavy.

That's understandable. The Soviet Union is far away, and there are more than enough dams in the way, while here you're up to your neck with worries: taxes smother you, gasoline prices are increasing, decent people are being kidnapped, bombs are exploding at every step, and then there are some sort of Falkland Islands at the back of beyond. World War I started over some sort of Archduke Franz-Ferdinand; no one knew him.

But to speak openly, it's not even a question of circles not spreading out in the water, it's something else. In acquiring

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freedom, you lost something else, something very important: the awareness that you have shown courage, gone against the current, risked something. No, now you won't be risking anything. Neither your position, nor your Party card, nor your apartment, nor a trip to Koktebel, nor even a kilogram of paper from the Literary Fund. Nothing! And it turns out that without this you're just not writing the same.

It turns out that we writers are very vain. It's not enough that you were lucky enough, let us suppose, to tell the world about something still unknown. (The censor overlooked something, an editor friend helped.) No, you still need someone to take you aside and, looking around, to shake your hand: "Well done, fellow!" You even recall the endless lectures with a certain nostalgic longing. I remember after I gave my speech at Babi Yar I had to meet with a dozen moronic pensioners all decorated out with their military insignia. Of course, there were some former prosecutors among them and Party figures as well. They just wouldn't let up: "Why did you go there? Did you have to give a speech? Who gave you the right?"

When midnight grew near, I couldn't take it anymore and said: "You know what? Don't wear me out with questions. I'm tired. Keep in mind that you and I are in different situations. You're asking the questions, I'm answering. But someday there'll come a time when I'll write about all of this. And about each of you individually." They were a bit taken aback, but one of them asked: "Where and when? Who will publish you?" "That's my business," I answered, and, as strange as it may seem, the interrogation ended at that. They glanced at their watches—"It's already twelve o'clock!"—and left.

No, there's nothing of the kind here. And later I did write about these decrepit old men, but I had already forgotten their names; I hadn't written them down in time. So that I fired a blank shot, so to speak. But at least I feel better about it.

Still, feeling better doesn't save me from having to answer the question. What to write about? Whom to address?

I am answering it. For me. Just for me. I write about what comes into my head. Not burdening myself with form, composition, or a preconceived plan. About something left unsaid, or something suddenly remembered; about something you long for, having parted with it forever, and that you'll never see again;

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and about what you saw after the parting tears and embraces in Kiev, the new things, expected and unexpected, still not understood, often exasperating, but which sometimes bring joy. I just wish I could show it to my dour messenger Valega or to Vanka Fishchenko, a brave fellow near Stalingrad. He's probably gotten into trouble by now and is behind bars. . . .

For them, unattainable, I write, although I will never know whether they liked it or not. And for a handful of friends on both sides of the detestable Berlin Wall; well, let's say for fifty, no more than a hundred dear friends, whose opinion I value. I won't be inundated with readers' letters any more, and there won't be even any small articles on me in the *Literary Gazette* or a little black box around my name when I set off for another, better world. (Even the great Varlam Shalamov, who was a slave in the camps for decades, got his little black box.) So I'll have to get along without that.

There is a Russian proverb: "Living your life is harder than crossing a field." But we, each in his own way, stumbling perhaps at places, have crossed it, even with its mines.

DANIEL BELL: Thank you, thank you very much.

Our next speaker is Dr. Eugen Loebl, who comes from Czechoslovakia. He is, probably in the most literal sense of the word, a survivor. He is a man who had been an official in the Czechoslovak government, who was arrested and brought to trial during the Slansky trial. He and only one other person, Arthur London, survived. Professor Loebl came here twelve years ago. He is an economist and taught at Vassar College until recently, when he retired. It's my great pleasure to present Dr. Eugen Loebl.

EUGEN LOEBL: Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, I'm very very sorry to disappoint you. I'm not really a writer, but you will see I am writing about a very dismal science, economics, and an even more dismal science, political science.

My career as a dissident started, actually, when I opposed capitalism during the Depression. As you remember, there was tremendous unemployment, a great economic crisis in Europe and here. And, like today, the economists had no idea why the Depression occurred, what was its cause, how to overcome it. And although there was no inflation as far as money was concerned, there was as much inflation as there is today in regard to

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words and articles about the economic crisis or recession, without any positive solution in sight.

At that time I became attracted to Marxism for two reasons: that Marxism promised a humane solution, and particularly that it claimed to be a science, and, as such, a tool, a guide to how to create a humane society. At this time I became a member of a small group of Marxist theoreticians. During the War, in the exiled government in London, I was in charge of the ministry dealing with the future of Czechoslovakia, where I tried to project Marxist concepts into what we thought would be a very democratic society based on the Czechoslovak, the democratic tradition. And though we came home, and I spent quite a lot of time in the Soviet Union studying planning and the many economic problems there, I was appalled by the inhumane features of the society and the inefficiency of the economy. I tried to ascribe it not so much to Marxism as to the backwardness of the country and particularly to the effect of the war and the demoralization that accompanies war. But also in Czechoslovakia I could see that none of our aims was being fulfilled. We did think that we were creating a humane society, but it was everything but humane. We older Marxists discussed it and asked ourselves, Where did we make a mistake? We had no answer.

It so happened that, being in charge of the Ministry of Foreign Trade, I had to negotiate with Mr. Mikoyan, the Minister of Foreign Trade, a very powerful member of the Politburo, who insisted that the Soviet Union should orient its exports toward the Soviet Union and not toward the West, while I insisted that foreign trade should be oriented toward the West—the highly developed West—because that was where our future lay. And although under those political conditions he had to give in and sign such an agreement, very soon the Communist Party took over and the Soviet government had its bridge heads in the form of some secret agents in Czechoslovakia.

The problem was solved in a very simple way: I was put in prison by the Soviet intelligence officers. They organized the Slansky trial our moderator spoke about, and I was sent to jail for life. I spent eleven years in prison, which in itself was not of great interest for me and my future. What is of interest is that I was in solitary confinement for five years altogether, and it proved to be, apart from many inconveniences, an ideal condition for

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thinking. One has to think in order to survive, and being all by oneself, one could think without any inhibitions and images; one's reality is not influenced.

Just to find the truth. What was the truth I was looking for? I asked myself whether all that I'd seen in the Soviet Union—or for that matter, in Czechoslovakia, and particularly what I'd experienced in prison—whether this was a deviation of Marxism or something built into Marxism. I did hope that the result would be that it was a deviation of Marxism, that I was just a victim of this deviation, as it happens so very often in the history of mankind that very great ideas are distorted in practice. But the more I thought, the more I tried to come to the very roots of Marxism and social philosophy and general philosophy, I came to the very tragic conclusion (tragic for me) that all these dehumanizing phenomena I noticed both in Czechoslovakia and in the Soviet Union—despite the fact that in Czechoslovakia our aim was to create a humane society—that it is deeply built-in in Marxism, that there is no Marxism with a human face. And there is no Marxism that can be in whatever respect humane.

There is no doubt that Marx's point of departure, as well as that of my generation of Marxists, was to create a humane society. Why is it that not a humane society but the opposite has been created? I came to the conclusion that the very feature of Marxism that attracted me most—that it is a scientific tool—was the cause of all the shortcomings of Marxism, theoretical or applied. Why? Marx applied the method of the natural sciences to society. He wanted to discover the laws of motion; he saw the development of society as a determined process of natural historical determinism and inevitability. And actually he eliminated all values. Capitalism was in Marxist terminology not at all bad and not at all good. It was a certain stage of development. History made capitalism and history will destroy capitalism. The proletariat was not good or bad; it was just a product of history, a historical agent. At the same time, it was created by history; the proletarian class will one day disappear when we abolish the forms of private ownership. So the question of good and bad did not exist. And we had there actually a question of—to use a term that will be particularly familiar to our highly esteemed moderator—we had a question of the end of ideology. Marxism is a pseudo-science because it applies the methods of the natural sciences to perfectly

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different subject matter. And the method of a scientific approach to humane social systems—a system *sui generis* as compared to natural scientific subject matter—cannot be understood, conceived, with the terms and concepts and methods of thinking of the natural sciences. And it was also a pseudo-ideology, because on the one side it did emphasize ideology or values, but on the other side, the materialization of the so-called ideology was based on a science meaning the end of ideology.

So, consequently, when I parted with Marxism, I could not accept capitalist theories that, from the very beginning, starting with the physiocrats up to the classics, also saw in the economy part of the natural system. They did not perceive the economic system as *sui generis*. And though I had, in order to survive, to try to develop a theory whose point of departure was a society's human system, I realized that we must accordingly create a different method of thinking than both capitalist and socialist theories.

At the time when we had the great advance, the attempt to create socialism with a human face, I did publish a book in Czechoslovakia that I had written in my memory in solitary confinement. And there was a period when there was no censorship, so it has been published. The title of the book was *Mental Work as a Source of Wealth,* as opposed to the Marxist concept of manual work as a source of wealth, which both Adam Smith and Karl Marx applied as their point of departure. But anybody who observed what went on in Czechoslovakia could see that those who organized the reforms, who were actually former Stalinists (including Dubcek) and remained Marxists, put great emphasis on socialism, while the people had accepted the reform movement with the far greater emphasis on the human face. And if the Soviets had permitted us to develop our system, the conflict between the human face and socialism or Marxism would have been manifest.

But the Soviets came. And long before the invasion of Czechoslovakia took place I had been invited by the organizers of a remarkable international seminar in Princeton (where we also met, Professor Bell) and it so happened that on the trip to New York and Princeton I read his book, *The End of Ideology*. A highly sophisticated book, Mr. Bell, which demonstrates fantastic knowledge and intellectual honesty, but I was very deeply disturbed by this book. I left one end of ideology and came into

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another country where they speak of the end of ideology. At the meeting in Princeton, where the most sophisticated American scholars participated, there were certain signs of a society that has accepted the end of ideology. I remember Mr. Kennan, who saw in America only an endless number of mortal dangers. There was no belief in values, no belief in democracy. Professor Bell was attacked in the most Stalinist, Bolshevik way by Mr. Podhoretz. Now Mr. Podhoretz is, I think, on the right of Professor Bell—one of the neoconservatives. But the main impression I had, and I also spoke about it, was not that there were multiple views, which is very healthy, but that there was no common basis. There were no different views based on something common, on something with common values. Ethics and politics were divorced. And the next step of the end of ideology was that Mr. Kissinger, who also attended this conference, for one afternoon only, introduced a foreign policy based on détente, a foreign policy that assumed that there are two great powers that have somehow to come to some kind of agreement through negotiations instead of confrontation. They did not realize, these philosophers of the end of ideology, that there are not just two great countries, but there are two worlds. And no détente is possible between a totalitarian world and a world of at least relative freedom.

And we see today—I just came from Europe—that the lack of any binding ideology with regard to foreign policy creates a situation of neutralism, anti-Americanism in Europe, of loss of will not to surrender to the Soviet Union, and a most primitive view—better Red than dead. And the American answer is a strengthened defense, which is as primitive, as dangerous, as mortal for our civilization as the Western European foreign policies.

I think that Western foreign policies, to create first of all a unity of the West, must be based on those values out of which our civilization emerged. And this is freedom and peace. We must be able to project these values into a concrete, real, realistic foreign policy. As a matter of fact, I don't think that America as a world power has any foreign policy at all. There are no long-term strategic goals; there are just pragmatic practical answers to actions initiated by the Soviets. And there is even a danger that, if we permit things to continue in this direction, there won't be

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even an East-West conflict; that the West, Europe, may simply surrender, and a very dangerous age of the end of civilization, the end of ideology, may emerge.

So now let me say a few words about the role of dissidents in this context. I'm speaking as a Slovak dissident. We have a very big worldwide organization, though we are a very small nation, called the Slovak World Congress. And we have developed a theory, an economic theory, whose point of departure is the Judeo-Christian philosophy of man, to be projected into economic categories and theories. And as far as foreign policy is concerned, also the effort here, by the Congress, the State Department, and also, recently in Germany too, with a number of politicians and organizations, is a strategy for peace and freedom.

We do not think that we dissidents are wiser or more moral or have the inherent right to become advisers of the country where we live. But we have, first of all, the advantage of living in a free country; and after our experience we appreciate the freedom here far more than you who were born here and have lived here all your life and take everything for granted and don't see the great achievements of this country. On the other hand, we have first-hand experience of where a society ends up if the system is not based on human values. The issue is not that the system has to be based on "un"human values in order to be inhuman; the mere fact that it is not based on human values makes it inhuman.

I was deeply impressed when I heard this morning's two speakers—writers who deeply realize the importance of emphasizing human values in art, in literature. And, consequently, you should not be surprised that, as both Mr. Nekrasov and Mr. Aksyonov said, the scope of Soviet, of Russian literature is far wider than it is here, because it deals with all aspects of the endless dimensions of human beings and not just with those aspects that make for bestsellers. In this sense I think that our task is—and I'm particularly happy that we can discuss it with such a scholar of the opposite school as Professor Bell—our task is to emphasize the importance of human values, the importance of human ideology, the importance of throwing overboard the so-called technocratic or econometric methods that apply only to what is quantifiable.

We are living in a world where only the quantifiables, or pragmatic values, are taken into consideration. And I am deeply

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convinced that unless we come back to the beginning of ideology and project ideological values, human values, into our social and economic sciences, including political science, we have betrayed the very foundations of our civilization and we have contributed to its doom. Thank you.

DANIEL BELL: Thank you, Mr. Loebl. I would like to encourage discussion, but first, let me ask a question of Mr. Aksyonov, one that also applies to Mr. Nekrasov and Mr. Loebl, though I think it's directly in terms of Mr. Aksyonov's notion. There is a current of thought here, possibly best expressed by someone like George Steiner, who says: "At least in the Soviet Union they take literature seriously; in the West they don't. And one of the proofs is, after all, that the KGB attends all the meetings of the writers and takes notes. Isn't that a tribute to writers?" Now it's almost become a form of chic here to make statements of that kind. I wonder if you would comment on it.

VASSILY AKSYONOV: Yes, I'm talking of the fact that in general this exaggeration of the role of literature is based on a Russian tradition, because in Russia on the whole there has never been free expression of political thought: both the public and the readers have tried to find through the writers answers to various accursed questions about Russian reality, and have seen literature as a kind of substitute for the expression of public opinion, of public life. But under the Soviet regime this has become a colossal exaggeration, and the Soviet authorities often fight bitterly against books as if their entire fate—the fate of their whole regime—were at stake. And in general, they actually create their enemies themselves. They are totally incapable of being flexible. I'm talking here about the fact that they have developed in themselves a provincial fear of literature, and they try to fight against literature as if it were a very serious political enemy, and each of us writers who have emigrated knows this through his own experience.

DANIEL BELL: Is there anybody in the audience . . .

MARGARITA DUBOYSKAYA: I'm an engineer. I emigrated two years ago and work at an engineering firm. I was struck by Dr. Loebl's speech. I am now surrounded by Americans and, working with them, I feel I cannot break through the wall of their naive incomprehension. I try to explain things to them in my English, which in general is not yet a language. I was surprised

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that Dr. Loebl didn't talk of his experiences in prison, about how painful it was.

But then how can there be any dialogue between a prison—a well-organized prison—and the free world? But the Americans still say: You're wrong, because if you have a preconceived notion that a bandit is a bandit, and you can only talk with him in the language of power, then he'll be a beast. You must speak with him as with a person. I wish I could speak in public somewhere to tell people not to believe their Marxist professors. We know what we see, know when they grab you by the throat and see in your eyes, not just in your words, whether you believe them or not. Not a single dictatorial regime orders you to love it; it says: Listen to me, submit to me while I exist. But in the Soviet Union we must love our authorities, and this is something people can't understand. In general, we have here an eschatological sense of the end of the world, because people are naive and don't understand what is going on. This is probably what possesses all us Russians; this is not only my pain. Understand, you who write, try to explain things, because we will all perish together if we don't understand something today. Thank you.

EUGENE GOODHEART: What I'm going to ask may sound a little perverse coming after that impassioned statement, but this is really a follow-up to Professor Bell's question. I think Mr. Nekrasov spoke of writing in the Soviet Union as a kind of juggling act: you have to be a circus performer, you have to be very resourceful, ingenious, inventive, fantastic. And now that Mr. Nekrasov and other dissident writers have left the Soviet Union, they don't have the problem of avoiding censorship. And so the question is, How do you compensate in your work for the loss of censorship?

VASSILY AKSYONOV: Censorship has subtle meanings. For example, Yuri Trifonov said that censorship can give you some opportunities to develop your peculiar style, because in trying to find some loopholes to avoid the restrictions of censorship, a writer can develop in more and more sophisticated ways. But it seems to me that Yuri Trifonov was the only writer who really succeeded. But here in the West we face the problem of inner censorship, the censorship of taste.

JAPANESE GRADUATE STUDENT: As you can see, I am Japanese, a graduate student of Russian literature, presently

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studying at Harvard. Vassily Pavlovich, when you left the Soviet Union the year before last, I recall you said that this was not a loss for you; on the contrary, it would have a beneficial influence on your work in the future. And then you mentioned Nabokov. Somehow it's difficult for me to imagine that you will become an American writer, since you write in Russian. I'm interested in how life in a so-called free country influences what you are writing now.

VASSILY AKSYONOV: I'm not going to write prose in English, no way, because it's too late for me. But if in my childhood I'd had a governess speaking English, as Nabokov had, or if I'd defected twenty years ago from the Soviet Union to the West, when it first occurred to me . . . Well, anyway, I told you about my own experience. For me, probably, at this moment of my life, it's not harmful to my writing but probably rather useful, and I hope that I will be inside American literary life with my Russian writing, to be a part of American cultural life as well as of my own culture. You know, when you leave behind forty-nine years of your life, it means that you have enough luggage for future writing.

## Writing in an Open and a Closed Society

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: We hope there will be some disagreement, some polemics, in what we perceive to be an exchange of ideas. I assume that not all the dissidents agree with each other; we don't agree with each other. I think it would be interesting if we tried to air our disagreements as much as our agreements, because when you keep airing only your agreements, you tend to skate on the surface of the question; whereas you tend to go underneath the surface when disagreements arise.

The subject is, as you know, the writer in an open and a closed society, which involves several basic questions. One is the effect of censorship on writing. My own feeling is that censorship alone does not create the vitality of literature. If it did, then I for one would advocate censorship in America; maybe we would keep some of our self-indulgent writing from publication. It seems to me that writing of a high order flourished in Russia under the tsar and in the Soviet Union because of the ten-

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sions that existed in that society and because of the fact that the intelligentsia of the Soviet Union acted and thought in opposition to standard and official opinions. It seems to me that the Russian writing that I've read, mostly the émigré writers, some of whom are represented here (and including Solzhenitsyn, of course), has more energy, more vitality, covers a wider range of human interest, a wider range of political questions, of intellectual curiosity, than a good deal of American writing. Much American writing, except at its very best, is preoccupied with narrower subjects—with sex, the tensions in personal lives, interpersonal relationships, whereas the Russian writing I've read is concerned, not directly but indirectly, with the large questions that determine our political and human fate in this world. I also was surprised to see—and this seems to be a contradiction—how many Soviet writers were aware of, and picked up, the complexities and subtleties of writing that are typical of the Western tradition; how far they've gone from the doctrine of socialist realism, especially since, as we've heard today, many Soviet writers for a long time were not aware of developments in American or European literature and criticism.

I have an announcement. We invited Andrei Sakharov, the eminent Soviet physicist, who is now living in exile in Gorky, to this conference. We sent a registered letter, which required some kind of return notification that he had received it. We've received no such notification. Our guess is either that he never was permitted to receive our letter, or was not permitted to reply to it. Also, we just received a message from Senator Paul E. Tsongas.

> I'm pleased to learn of the efforts by the editorial staff of *Partisan Review* in sponsoring the conference on dissidents in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. We all know about the denial of basic human rights in these countries. The denial of permission to emigrate is one facet of this oppression in which the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe demonstrate flagrant violations of basic human rights as set forth in the Helsinki Accords. Let me assure you that I remain deeply committed to the cause of human rights and will continue my efforts on behalf of dissidents, refuseniks, victims of human rights violations all over the world. With best wishes, Paul E. Tsongas, United States Senator.

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Jan Kott will speak first, followed by Pavel Litvinov and Efim Etkind. Efim Etkind is a renowned scholar and literary critic who is best known for his courageous testimony affirming the literary merit and social contributions of Joseph Brodsky. This act, chronicled in *Notes of a Non-Conspirator,* coupled with his possession of some of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's manuscripts, led to his emigration. He teaches at the University of Nanterre, France. Jan Kott is a prominent literary scholar and critic who left Warsaw in the late 1960s. He has since taught at Yale and Berkeley and now teaches English and comparative literature at the State University of New York at Stonybrook. Among his books and articles are *The Eating of the Gods, Shakespeare Our Contemporary,* and *Theater Notebook.* Pavel Litvinov is best known for his role in defending Soviet dissidents and for his tireless efforts in trying to establish the facts in dissidents' cases. He compiled a book on the case of Aleksandr Ginzburg and Yuri Galanskov, who had earlier compiled a book on the case of Siniavsky and Daniel. And he served a five-year prison sentence for his demonstration against the invasion of Czechoslovakia, after which he was exiled. He currently works on the *Chronicle of Current Events,* a journal of human rights in the USSR. And he's the grandson, you might recall, of the famous Russian Foreign Minister Maxim Litvinov.

Jan Kott is the next speaker.

JAN KOTT: Hamlet came to Elsinore for the wedding of his mother to his uncle, who had killed his father; his uncle had become the king of Denmark. Hamlet came to Elsinore from Wittenberg. Elsinore, Denmark, is a prison, and Wittenberg is not. Let's assume for one moment that the opposition between Elsinore and Wittenberg, which was so crucial for Hamlet, is the same as the opposition between the open society and the closed one. For any director of *Hamlet,* the first choice is, Where is the audience? In Wittenberg, looking at the others, at the drama in Elsinore? Or is Elsinore *our* drama? The answer is that we are living in Elsinore, in the closed society.

It seems to me that one of the questions for this conference is, Where are we? In Elsinore, in Wittenberg, in what kind of society? Or, to put the matter in different terms, do we have to look at Wittenberg with the Elsinore perspective, or at Elsinore with

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the perspective of a free society, the proper society of Wittenberg? It seems to me this is the first question, because almost all of us here are people who left our own countries for this kind of open society.

In some way, it is possible to term the opposition between the closed one and the open one as the movement of emigration. In the movement of emigration, the opposition is between a country in which it's possible to live and a country in which it's either impossible to live—to write—or impossible to live with some kind of dignity.

Now, for the purposes of our conference, of course, and for this kind of audience, most of whom have come from the Soviet Union and from countries which, after Yalta, fell under the domination of the Soviet Union, the central problem is the Communist domination. But it seems to me that the problem of Communist domination is only one part of a much larger situation in which, after the 1970s and 1980s, a great part of the world became a world in which great numbers of people were emigrating from one country to another—a world in which a great part of its people are now émigrés, émigrés from the Soviet Union, from Poland, from other East European countries, with only a small number from Asia and Africa.

So, a question arises: the question of literature, of the essence of literature. To whom are we writing in the open society? We are writing to the open society about the situation of the émigré. And it seems to me that it is not by accident that the last three Nobel Prize winners in literature—Milosz, Canetti, Singer—are all émigrés, and have all, in some way, written émigré literature. Here, in the morning session, a very moving question arose. After leaving our own countries in which we could not write what we wished to write, in which we could not live in the way we wished to live, we now have complete freedom, but we have no audience, we are speaking with a full voice to a deaf world.

It seems to me that the most essential issue is to present the situation of the exiled writer, of the exile as a human fact of the twentieth century, of the émigré as representing the basic human situation. Of course, we have to understand why the nonhuman situation of the writer in a Communist country is finally becom-

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ing the nonhuman situation of human beings and of writers all over the world, in many countries.

I would like to take up a personal experience, and, if I may, I will refer once more to the opposition between Elsinore and Wittenberg. After World War II, the situation was as if Elsinore had come to Wittenberg: to Hungary, Poland, all the parts of Europe invaded by the Red Army. I remember quite well when, in 1947, while I was in Moscow, I had the opportunity to meet Pasternak. It was not so easy of course; they told me to stay in the hotel, to say that I had the flu, and later, through the help of friends, I was given permission, and by night we came to Pasternak's *dacha*. At this time, he was translating Slovatskij from Polish into Russian. He understood my Polish quite well; *he* spoke Russian. It was the second or third year after World War II. I was full of enthusiasm, and I told him that, more or less, we were free in Poland, we could write almost anything we wished. Pasternak looked at me the way an old man, or a mature man, looks at a child, and he said, Look! You are now singing like a bird, you are as free as a bird, and all of you are singing your own tune. But one morning, one day, all of you will wake up in a small cage, and under this cage will be the inscription, "The Former Surrealist," "The Former Expressionist," "The Former Formalist,"—all of them "The Enemy of the People"!

A few days later, I came back to Warsaw, and on the Writers' Union building there was a very big placard with an inscription stating, "The writers are the engineers of the human soul." And I understood quite well that Pasternak was right, that this was just the moment he'd spoken of—to use the words of Kafka, "a cage in search of a bird." The cage was Red. At this time, I was still naive, and a member of the Communist Party. There was only one thing that astonished me: Why are the writers the engineers of the human soul and not the engineers of the human mind? What is this strange concoction—engineers and soul?

I understood it two or three years later. I spent one summer in a resort by the Baltic where I once had dinner with the Deputy Minister of Heavy Industry in Poland. It was the beginning of the socialization of Poland, the beginning of the depression. Now, he was sure that literature was the greatest achievement, and I was sure that our introduction of coal was one of the great-

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est achievements of Polish technology. We were feeding each other with our own illusions. And at that moment, I understood something of that mysterious definition of literature, "Writers are the engineers of the soul." But it was many years later that I came to a fuller understanding of this perverse definition of literature, through one of Brecht's books, which was published after his death. I don't remember the exact title of this book, but it was on Chinese thought, and it presented a lot of material under the Chinese names for Stalin, Trotsky, and Brecht himself. One sentence was for me most astonishing. The Chinese character representing Brecht himself says that the one and only justification for The Great Terror was industrialization. The Great Terror as a *fact* Brecht understood quite well, but to justify The Great Terror by Russia's need for industrialization? This was almost exactly the same as my conversation, three years back, with the Deputy Minister of Heavy Industry. Industrialization was a fiction, but The Great Terror was not a fiction. Now literature was to be perverted into a tool for justifying The Great Terror, by extolling the great fiction of industrialization.

It is important to note that this perversion of literature was much more limited in Poland than it was in the Soviet Union. One can say that, during the years of Stalinization and the post-Stalin era, Poland lived on two different levels. On one level, Poland lived in economic depression and under the impact of the Soviet Union. On another level, Poland was still living under the impact of the spontaneous, autonomous, authentic tradition of Western literature. Now the Polish experience has been quite different from the Czech and Hungarian experience, and completely different from the Russian one. In some way, Marxism, the Communist models, were under the surface in Poland; the oppression was much more political in nature, and the intellectual oppression was only the result, the consequence of the political one.

I remember a conference of dissidents very similar to this one, in Venice. We had more or less the same kind of discussion, and many of the participants were the same. Also attending were a few students from Poland. After the discussion, they came and said to me, "Stop all this nonsense! There is only one choice for Poland—to get rid of the occupation."

If we look at the Polish experience of the last eighteen

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months before the coup, we see a fairly clear example of literary fiction creating a social fiction. And in a very short time, in two or three months after the ending of political repression, Polish literature and even the Polish newspapers and universities came back to Western culture, to the free Wittenberg—or, to use another expression, to the open society. The greatest experience of Poland was that, under the Yalta pact, without any surcease of repression, without a change in the political situation, without a change in its domestic life, in its soul, Poland was free for eighteen months, and Poland was free with the highest hopes. One of the greatest crimes is the killing of hope. The coup was the killing of hope.

Let us return, then, to our preliminary question. To whom are we writing? Who is our audience? It seems to me that the greatest thing for us—writers from the Soviet Union and from all the countries in which freedom does not exist, in which *human* life is impossible—the greatest thing we can do is to give this experience to the open society where we are not mute, where we do not have a deaf audience. But if the West does not listen, if the West fails to understand this feeling of hope, if the West fails to understand what the crackdown of liberty really is, then it will mean the death of the open society!

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: Thank you. Pavel Litvinov is next.

PAVEL LITVINOV: This morning I believe it was my friend Vassily Aksyonov who told a joke about the leaflets that were distributed by somebody in Moscow and found by the KGB to be blank. He was asked why he did this, and he said, "Everybody knows everything, so you don't need to write anything in leaflets." I wish it were true. Unfortunately, not everybody knows everything. The longer I live in this country—and I've already been here eight years—I understand more and more that nothing can replace information. I believe in Russia people just become cynical and assume anything and everything, but continue to be defenseless against those who really know at least something. In fact, in our century, more than before, I believe, those who have information have power. I will tell a joke, more relevant in my opinion, one that has more to do with reality. The joke, which some people here probably already know, is that once Alexander the Great and Napoleon were invited to watch the Soviet Army parade on Red Square. And after they'd watched the parade,

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Alexander the Great said, "Oh! If I'd had an army like that, with those weapons and missiles and bombs, I definitely would be the ruler of the world forever." Napoleon said, "No, I wouldn't need those weapons. I would be able to rule the world much more simply if I had a newspaper like *Pravda*, because then nobody would know about Waterloo." I believe that this joke, unfortunately, has much more truth in it, and anybody who lives in the Soviet Union knows about that.

When people speak about literature in the Soviet Union, they usually mean what in English—in America at least—is called "fiction." Fiction, such as when people write about worlds that they imagine and which they populate with heroes—whether to look closer at life or to look at life from a distance—is still called fiction.

But I want to talk about a special Russian type of what in America is called nonfiction literature, which in part at least appeared to relieve the hunger for information in the Soviet Union.

In that miraculous period of Soviet history after the death of Stalin, and roughly up to the years 1965–1966, certain things could be published officially, from Aksyonov's *Ticket to the Stars* to Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*—books written by authors in this room or in other places. And at that time, it looked like the Soviet authorities weren't arresting people for their writings. At least we didn't know about such arrests, although there were cases even during that period. But still, this was probably the mildest period in Soviet history, in terms of literature and many other areas of life. It all changed almost overnight, with the arrest in Moscow of the writers Siniavsky and Daniel; in Kiev and other places, of other people. And in those years the harrassment of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn started as well.

At that time, a certain place in the Russian literary scene started to belong to a special kind of literature—literature, we can say, in defense of Russian literature, literature that appeared in defense of Russian writers. People started to write letters and articles in defense of arrested writers, to collect them in volumes, to send those volumes abroad, and to circulate them in *samizdat*. Aleksandr Ginzburg and Yuri Galanskov and other people who helped them made a collection of documents that was called the *White Book in Defense of Siniavsky and Daniel*. I didn't help

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write it, but I did have a small part in translating some things for this book. They collected all the materials, including trial records and Soviet press clippings and foreign press clippings, and they tried to analyze the trial of Siniavsky and Daniel. Soon after that, as is well known, Ginzburg and Galanskov were arrested. At that time, I became one of those people who felt that I had to do something, and I started to collect material about the trial of Ginzburg and Galanskov and other people who spoke in their defense—among them, Vladimir Bukovsky. And I also collected documents published, if this word can be used, in *samizdat*—documents which were circulated in typewritten manuscripts and then sent abroad and published in America and other countries.

At that time there appeared something that later came to be called the human-rights movement, or the dissident movement, in the Soviet Union. Of course, some people argue about the exact time when it started, but definitely very soon it became quite clear that information about arrested writers—people arrested for saying or writing something—was plentiful. The information started to circulate and somebody had to take responsibility for getting all this information together. And a very important magazine appeared, the *Chronicle of Current Events*, which is devoted exclusively to information about violations of human rights—arrests of writers, prohibitions against books and movies, hunger strikes in labor camps, harrassment of different nationalities, religious groups, and so on. This type of writing started in bimonthly, anonymous *samizdat* magazines, then began to circulate and even to be published in the West. The most surprising thing is that the *Chronicle of Current Events* started in April 1968, and now we have the sixty-second issue of this magazine, which, almost without interruption (though it once was interrupted for eighteen months) still appears. People who write for this magazine, though most of their names are unknown to the public, continue to be harrassed, arrested, fired from their jobs, sent to mental hospitals and prisons. But the magazine, miraculously, continues to appear. I happen to be a lucky person who was around when the first issues of *Chronicle* appeared and started circulating in *samizdat*.

And this type of literature—those books and collections of trials, this type of nonfiction—started in a way to dominate the

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literary scene. The amount of material of this type that reaches the West and circulates, I would say, doubles almost every three years. And it created a new type of literature—literature in defense not only of writers, but of other people, of different groups in the Soviet population. Of course, some of you will ask, Is it literature? A lot of it is, in fact, quite poorly written perhaps. Soviet propaganda once said that even a typist for *Chronicle* is called a writer in the West when so-called Western propaganda tries to raise questions about the Soviet Union. It is true that such things could happen—that some people who are not traditionally considered writers would be called writers in this case. But the truth is, when censorship and secret police exist, when the KGB harrasses literature and writers, good and bad writers are, in a way, equal. They are persecuted for what they write, not for the quality of their writing. It might not be literature, but it is a call for help. And when you hear a call for help, it's no time to ask for quality.

Being here in the West, and trying to help those who are still in the Soviet Union, who are part of the noble tradition of this literature, I call upon all of you here to continue to work in defense of literature in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. And let's not forget today's writers who are persecuted or in prison. I think it's our duty today, in the open society where we live now—including those people who have always been here—not to forget about those other people and about the importance of speaking out for them. Write letters and telegrams; provide information for international organizations that try to defend human rights in the Soviet Union and other countries.

I'd like to mention just a few writers who are currently being harrassed or who are in prison. Among them is my friend Anatoly Marchenko, author of the famous book *My Testimony*, about the post-Stalin Gulag, who, after spending more than ten years in prison camps, was sentenced for his attempts to write other books and for defending other people who were sentenced to ten years of labor camp. I want you to remember that he is very ill and most probably won't survive another prison term. We have to do something, we have to speak up and call upon world public opinion to help Anatoly Marchenko. There is another writer, Evgeny Kozlovsky, whom I've never met, a fiction writer who was a member of *Almanac* and who is now in prison and

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being interrogated under tremendous pressure from the KGB for his writings, which were published abroad in different émigré magazines. He is facing at least three years of labor camp and maybe even more. And I would mention one other writer, who is probably one of the best living Russian writers, Georgi Vladimov. His apartment was searched and he is under threat of arrest, and we need to help him. And, of course, one of the most remarkable people whom I've ever met in my life, Andrei Sakharov, who is, as you know, in exile in Gorky. He was invited here but he couldn't make it. And of course, his name and his personality have made him known as one of the best defenders of human rights in the world. He needs all our remembrance and support.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: Thank you. Mr. Efim Etkind goes next.

EFIM ETKIND: Ladies and gentlemen, I have titled my presentation "Some Thoughts on the Literary Lie and Lying Literature"; that is, on the general topic of literatures in open and closed societies. A lie is not contradictory to literature. On the contrary, it is its defining property. Creating new people and interrelations between them, inventing convincing situations at times more plausible than real life, the writer, according to the bounds of common sense, lies. However, his lie often serves for the expression of deep truth, of that which cannot be expressed directly. Either this is not realizable through "measured verse and icy words" (to quote Lermontov), or it may be that external prohibitions restrict the author. Such are the two basic reasons for the indirectness of literature. A direct word is impossible because the truth is inexpressible or forbidden. In Western societies the first reason operates; in the Soviet Union the second predominates. The result is the same in both situations: indirectness.

The two forms of indirectness are born of contrary reasons, of an inner crisis of artistic expression in the open society, and of external censorship (police prohibition) in the closed society. In general there are different kinds of lies. Free literature lies by its indirectness, striving to express the truth, which means it lies for the good. Controlled literature lies not for good, but for evil; with all its inherent indirect forms it is called upon to paint lies about man and society. This is its function from the point of view of those who endeavor to control it. A certain part of it, a powerless and controlled part, surrenders and allows itself to be manipulated. The other, infinitely larger part resists as far as

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possible and, in order to hold its ground in the difficult battle, creates new variants of indirectness, constructed on top of the original ones. The world is divided in half not only politically and ideologically; the literatures of the two halves also lead different lives. There are similarities, of course. Everywhere literature is a verbal art, consisting of definite forms and genres. Still, the structure of verbal art differs in the West and in the East. Different relationships have taken shape between the state and the author, the author and the reader, the author and his work, the reader and the book and, finally, between separate parts of literature as such.

State and author: In the majority of democratic countries, the relationships between state and author cannot be fixed because of constitutional principles and guarantees. Neither novels nor plays nor film scenarios can directly serve political goals. Even television, radio, and the press pride themselves on their independence. Sometimes this is unrealizable. In France, Hersant, and in Germany, Axel Springer have taken possession of such a quantity of newspapers and magazines that each determines the direction of political thought inside his empire. However, this is not yet literature, but the press. In every country there are influential writers, people in one way or other connected to political parties. But even they do not speak for the parties, but write as writers. Governments do not ordinarily ingratiate themselves with writers; they don't even attempt to place writers at their service.

In Soviet society everything is the opposite. In the first place, the government—or in any case, the regime—is not elected. The Communist Party, which came to power in 1917, has remained the sole governing party. In the sixty-five years that have since passed, it has created for itself not only a stable and comfortable bureaucratic apparatus—administrative, military, police, party, trade union—but the ideological institutions it needs as well. The Writers' Union proved a perfect tool for the control of literature. From the very beginning, only those who proved their devotion to the regime were admitted into it; the other writers, not admitted into the Union, are not taken seriously and are viewed by the administration as parasites deserving imprisonment or deportation. The Writers' Union provides its members with innumerable privileges. In exchange, only one

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thing is required of the writers: loyal compositions. Refusal to comply with this condition leads to expulsion from the Union, which involves a loss not only of privileges but, frequently, of the means of subsistence. Excluded in this way from the Union and condemned to public ostracism were Akhmatova, Zoschenko, Pasternak, Lidia Chukovskaya, Vladimir Kornilov, Solzhenitsyn, Voinovich. Later, writers indignant at the dictatorship of the Union and its perfidious behavior began to leave on their own, and, sacrificing all privileges (I use the words of Georgi Vladimov), "expelled the Writers' Union from their lives." Among those who took such an action were Georgi Vladimov, Lipkin, Lisnyanskaya. The Union leaders were aware of the artistic talent of each of them. These writers were excluded, or forced to make a break, not because of a lack of talent, but because of political disagreement.

In the processes of expulsion, insidious use is made of respected writers who, for some reason or other, value privileges and agree to participate in the executions, taking refuge behind patriotic phraseology. Among such helpers of the executioner we often see unexpected people, such as the poets Slutsky, Dudin, Botvinnik, the children's writer Agnia Barto, the literary critic Orlov, the essayist Sergey Sergeevich Smirnov, and many others. What is required of the writers? Work in the spirit of socialist realism, i.e., glorification of the regime and the attribution to it of those qualities that the regime does not possess: democracy, equality, fairness, freedom, unity.

In a democratic society every citizen is exposed to all forms of intellectual and spiritual influences. A society of the Soviet type is conceived and constructed in order that a person be informed exclusively one-sidedly, in a direction desirable for the Party. Information about non-Marxist teachings can reach the reader only through works containing criticism of such teachings. All the rest do not get past the censors. However, in recent years the prohibitions have become weaker, and, for example, the journal *Voprosy Literatury* (*Questions of Philosophy*) manages to acquaint its subscribers with the philosophical systems of Kierkegaard or Heidegger, as well as with Averintsev's work, "On Early Christian Culture," and with such research as the article by Cecilia Keene, "Catholic Culture in Italy Today."

It is possible to write today in a journal about the work of

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Italian writers, such as Giovanni Testa or Mario Pomilio or Luigi Santucci, by pretending that such an account corresponds to problems that at one time interested Marx. The justification is not only strange, but even comical. However, no one is disturbed by this, for the present-day Italian writers are of interest to everyone. Cecilia Keene, in quoting Marx, follows the terms of the game required of her. The same conditions are observed by the editor of the journal who prints her article. The reader understands this game, and he knows what type of interrelation exists between the reader and the journal. He also, for example, understands that the article by Vitaly Ozerov, called "The Image of the Communist in Soviet Literature," is included here so that the journal can be printed. On page twelve is the lead sentence and the necessary magical incantation: "The goal of our literature, to which it has been inspired by the decisions of the 25th Party Congress, is to reflect the depth and significance of changes, the distinctive features of a developed socialist society." This sentence means absolutely nothing, but it is necessary as a magical sentence, so that the journal can be printed. And further on the author, law-abiding Vitaly Ozerov, cites the supreme argument: "For the realization of this goal literature has a wonderful reference point—the trilogy of Comrade Brezhnev: *Malaya Zemlya, Rebirth,* and *Virgin Land.*" Yes, yes. The wretchedly banal pseudomemoirs of a sclerotic bureaucrat are called a trilogy, as are called the books of Lev Tolstoy *Childhood, Boyhood,* and *Youth,* as is called Dante's *Divine Comedy.* But this is not all. It is said about these compositions: "An impressive chronicle of the heroic achievements of the Party and the people has been created. The conscious spiritual uplifting of society and personality during the Civil War and the building of Communism has been replicated. Reading the trilogy, we see with our own eyes the many-faceted work of communists." All these words are not false, but totally empty. The words—*chronicle, people, spiritual uplifting, personality, society*—have become absolutely hollow objects.

I think that all 25,000 subscribers to *Voprosy Literatury* already know this, whether they have read the trilogy or not. They know its value, just as they know the value of the Lenin Prize that crowns it, and of each sentence of Vitaly Ozerov's article, which first and foremost disgraces the Russian language. Any is-

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sue of any journal testifies to the agreement between the publisher and the author on the one hand, and between the publisher and the reader on the other. Such an agreement is concluded between the Soviet author and the reader as well: to understand and not betray one another. The reader does not betray Cecilia Keene, or even Vitaly Ozerov and the editor of the journal, Mikhail Kuzmin; after all, all three of them are lying, all for their own purposes: Cecilia Keene, in order to talk about the Catholic writers of Italy; Vitaly Ozerov, to receive a prize and a high position; Mikhail Kuzmin, to publish Cecilia Keene on the one hand, and on the other, to keep his readers and not lose his editorship. A multistage lie is the law of existence of literature in the USSR. But Soviet people need literature. All the participants in this agreement know this. In essence there are no other forms of spiritual food that are acceptable in the USSR. This is demonstrated by the fact that Soviet literature is indirect. It can say a lot without saying anything directly. Prohibitions apply to the direct word, but it is difficult to apply them to the indirect one.

As a result of the fact that the functions of literature in the USSR differ from those in the West, differences in their inner make-up are natural. I am referring to certain genre-form peculiarities. About the fact, for example, that the novel, and in particular the epic novel in the Soviet Union, has a much greater significance than in the West, because the novel takes the place of both sociological and historical research. Specifically, large epic works are much more important to the Soviet writer than to the Western writer, and this is particularly true of the historical novel. This is also true of historical subject matter in poetry. For example, even in the thirties, the years of The Great Terror, we read verses about Ivan the Terrible and understood whom the author really had in mind. Dmitri Kedrin had then written a poem called "Architects," in which he spoke of those who built St. Basil's Cathedral, and how Tsar Ivan supposedly ordered that their eyes be cut out so they could never create such beauty again. But every line of the historical poem "Architects" hit the mark. I am speaking of the romanticized biographies in the series "Lives of Extraordinary People" and in general of biographies that acquire great significance in the Soviet Union. But I am also speaking of the genres of classicism, which no longer exist in the

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West, but which live on in Soviet literature for various historical reasons, about which Andrei Siniavsky spoke in his article "On Socialist Realism"; that is, about Soviet classicism—epigrams, fables, and all kinds of other genres, and a special genre that has extraordinary significance for Soviet literature: translation, in which, as it turns out, it is possible to say everything that cannot be said in the original literature. Here is an example from a remarkable book by the recently deceased, brilliant translator Lev Ginzburg, who, for example, translated an epigram written by the German poet Logau. The epigram goes this way. (Just let somebody try to publish it as a Russian work!)

> What does it mean nowadays
> to be fabulously bold,
> to call black—black
> and white—white,
> to compose no pompous odes
> to murderers,
> to lie only out of need
> and without need not to lie?

Literature always finds the possibility and means for existence, even, it seems, when it appears to be at an impasse, and can exist no longer. Thank you.

JAN BUDHARU: I am from Rumania, and I am a writer. I left Rumania because I couldn't read, I couldn't live my life with dignity. Jan Kott reminded us of the Stalin slogan "engineer of the human soul." All my young years as a writer I remembered these wonderful words. Then, anybody had a right to look at my manuscript and give me guidance and criticism. I don't know if you'll believe it, but I remember rewriting a novel twenty-two times, until I had forgotten what it was I had first begun to write. It doesn't matter. The problem is silence. In Rumania, as in Russia and Poland, we couldn't talk—we couldn't speak the truth. This caused a decay of the human personality, a degradation of the writer's profession. Here, because I *can* speak English (I have been here for six years), I listen, and still I don't talk. Because language is the instrument by which we transmit our thought and soul, and because we are living in America, we should speak and write in English. But we can't.

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I saw here in the lobby a lot of books in Russian and books translated from Russian into English. I am very grateful to the organizers of this conference, because they have given us the opportunity to talk and express our thoughts. But I think *we* should do something else. It's not enough to have Russian newspapers; we should have newspapers written in English by writers from the Eastern bloc, so that we can talk to the American people directly. Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: How long will the Soviet authorities be allowed to lie to the world with what amounts to the sanction of the entire world? President Carter did say something once in refutation of the lies, but he was hesitant; he didn't seem to know what he was saying even though he was refuting something.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: Are there any prophets here?

ANOTHER SPEAKER: Well, there was one person who knew—he wrote *1984*—but he's not with us today.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: You mean we have two years to go? Suppose we put the question in a different form. Some of our panelists might want to answer it. What are the prospects in the Soviet Union? For democratization? For tightening or for maintaining the status quo? Would any of you like to speak about that?

PAVEL LITVINOV: Well, now the question is more rhetorical, and I believe most people here can answer the question as well as I can or cannot. What can I say? It looks like today's world is not worried by the situation in Eastern Europe—except maybe in Poland, but perhaps not even there. The Western world is ready to accept what is going to happen, and I foresee nothing good. I am generally an optimist, but at the moment I see no basis for my optimism.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: What do you think will happen within the Soviet Union?

PAVEL LITVINOV: I believe that the movement for human rights in the Soviet Union will continue, but it needs a lot of help. Perhaps after Mr. Brezhnev's retirement and death some changes may bring something good, but they can always bring something bad as well.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: Does anyone else want to comment?

PHILIP KOKUR: Not so much a comment as a question. Do any of the panelists see any more opportunities under the Hel-

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sinki Accords to open up the situation for writers and other people in the cultural communities in Eastern Europe? Are there any more opportunities that we have not yet taken advantage of?

PAVEL LITVINOV: Immediately after the Helsinki Accords were signed, a group of Soviet dissidents, as you probably know, guided by the ideas of Professor Orlov, started the Moscow-Helsinki Watch group, and immediately such groups appeared in Kiev and Vilnius. Tomas Vendova, who is the representative of the Lithuanian-Helsinki group, is here and could tell about this experience, and others could tell more than I, because I left the Soviet Union before the Helsinki agreements were signed. But as I know from information I have received, the Helsinki agreement gave some boost to the human rights movement in the Soviet Union; and in Czechoslovakia, for example, the Charter 77 movement appeared very soon after. So there was definitely some kind of hope, and people started to send information from the Soviet Union, to be counted among the Helsinki signatories. During the Carter administration certain things were created—in Congress, the Commission for Security in Europe, for example. Helsinki Watch groups appeared in many countries in Europe. And in the last two years, when this Madrid conference started, there was a confrontation about Helsinki, and I was very pleased to see that Americans and Western European countries continued to stand up and not let the Soviet Union get away with violations—at least to the extent possible under the Helsinki agreements. Of course, everyone has to remember that the Helsinki agreements are not exactly binding agreements; they are declarations and juridically very poorly formulated. So not much could be done. And, as you know, all participants of Helsinki movements in the Soviet Union are either in prison or largely incapacitated, although several people in each group—in Moscow, in the Ukraine, in Lithuania, in Armenia—continue to speak out.

PHILIP KOKUR: I left the Soviet Union six years ago, and when I came here I thought I had a message to tell the American people about the Soviet Union. They didn't listen, and I thought I just wasn't good at explaining what I thought. But the same thing happened to other people who came from the Soviet Union with a very similar message. We are talking about the literature in exile today, which I believe has a very important mis-

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sion: to tell the American people about the differences between two systems, or rather, about the system under which the Soviet people live.

However, there is another important mission for this literature in exile: to tell the Soviet people the truth about the Soviet Union. I think this conference and its organizers, the editors of *Partisan Review*, as members of the publishing community here in America, can put pressure on the Soviet government to admit the émigré literature inside the boundaries of the Soviet Union. At least they can put pressure on the United States government to have Russian-language books published in exile admitted into the Soviet Union. I know some Soviet émigrés will think, "They won't let us," and of course they will try not to. And Americans will say, "This is interference in their internal affairs, so they are right in not letting us."

UNIDENTIFIED AUDIENCE MEMBER: What kind of peace movements are going on around the world? Are the Soviet people aware of the movement in this country against the proliferation of nuclear weapons, and what are their feelings? I think this is an overriding issue among all the peoples of the world, not only among Americans but among the Soviets and the French as well.

EFIM ETKIND: I live in France and can say there has not been anything like what has been happening in West Germany in recent months. In West Germany there have been enormous demonstrations for peace. These demonstrations produced a dual impression. It appears that Germany wants to disarm, and quite a bit has been written in the Russian press about these demonstrations, that they are a capitulation to the Soviet Union. I have read quite a number of articles recently suggesting that these demonstrations are financed with Soviet money. I think that in a sense there is some truth to this view, since the movement that has taken place in Germany serves the purposes of the Soviet Union. This does not mean at all, however, that it is actually instigated by the Soviet Union.

I was in Germany when President Reagan was heard on the radio there talking about the possibility of a limited atomic war that might confine itself to Europe. And I saw what a violent reaction these words brought forth in the most varied circles of the German population. To tell the truth, both President

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Reagan's words and the reaction of the German population horrified me.

In France there has been nothing like this, and in general the French conception of resistance seems to me at present to be much more firm, stable, and courageous. The French have created their own atomic weapons. They understand that they will not be able to fight properly and resist the Soviet Union on a one-to-one basis, but they believe in the necessity of the most decisive resistance to any aggression on the part of the Soviet Union.

So, one can say that in Europe two opposing conceptions have formed: one predominates in West Germany, the other in France, the two strongest countries in Europe.

PAVEL LITVINOV: I don't know much about what's going on in Europe, but the so-called peace movement in the United States worries me very much. Not because I am against peace and *for* nuclear war—I don't believe anybody is. But one thing is clear: when the Soviets are so strong and so dangerous, and when they increase their production of nuclear weapons, then this movement really becomes dangerous also, because the pressure of the American peace movement is clearly directed against the American government, as if the American government were the chief villain. And only the American government really will feel the offensive pressure of this movement. The Soviet people won't know when people in the Soviet Union try to stage some small peaceful demonstration—I don't mean Soviet citizens, but, for example, some young people from England who came to Moscow and tried to stage small peaceful demonstrations. They were immediately isolated from the public. Nobody even heard about them, and they were quickly deported. There is no peace movement possible in the Soviet Union. So the peace movement here—the American youth, the religious groups—is dangerous, because the Soviet Union—even if it doesn't want to start a war—wants to use the weapons they have to put pressure on the West. By wielding the threat of nuclear war, they can acquire one country after another—Afghanistan today, tomorrow it will be Iran, or something else. The peace movement won't prevent the war; it will probably make the war even more likely.

UNIDENTIFIED AUDIENCE MEMBER: I think my question might already have been answered by Mr. Litvinov; it's about peace movements in Russia. Based on your experience with free-

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dom of speech in Russia, do you think it's possible for there to be an independent peace movement in Russia today that is not a tool of the Soviet government? Specifically, there is an American disarmament group in Cleveland that has been corresponding with a group of women in the Soviet Union who say they are an independent peace group. In your opinion, and to your knowledge, would this be possible, or would these women be tools of the Soviet government?

PAVEL LITVINOV: My short answer is, of course, No. An independent peace movement is impossible at the present moment in the Soviet Union. I don't know what this group is, but I would say it's very likely an official Soviet group whose purpose is to fool the American public. The easiest way to find out would be for the American group in Cleveland to write to the Soviet group and ask to be invited to the Soviet Union to express their point of view to the Soviet public, to speak on Soviet T.V. together, and so on. If such a meeting could be arranged then I would take back my accusation.

MIHAJLO MIHAJLOV (University of Virginia): I have three short questions, and want to clear up something that I feel we should have cleared up at the outset this morning. First, what is the difference between dissident movements and all opposition movements in all right-wing dictatorships? Second, what is the difference between the dissident movement and all previous opposition movements in the USSR, even before World War II? And third, what is the difference between Soviet dissident movements and similar dissident movements in Poland, Yugoslavia, China, and so on? Are all these dissident movements similar? Does it mean that the dissident movement is international, or are there separate national movements?

PAVEL LITVINOV: I can't speak for everyone, but it looks like I've been appointed to answer all these questions.

TRANSLATOR: I have a suggestion: Why doesn't Mr. Mihajlov answer the questions himself?

PAVEL LITVINOV: That's a very good idea. For those who don't know, Mihajlo Mihajlov is a former Yugoslavian writer. He says he's from Virginia, but he is from Yugoslavia and was originally Russian, from a Russian émigré family in Yugoslavia.

MIHAJLO MIHAJLOV: In answer to my first question, if we remember the opposition before World War II, first there existed

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in the Soviet Union the so-called counter-revolutionaries and so on, but what was more important was the opposition within the Party—Trotsky, Bukharin, and so on. But no one at that time tried to appeal to Western public opinion or to use Western media. The one who started this was Djilas. He was really the father of all dissident movements. Everybody else—Sakharov, Solzhenytsin—have only followed his lead. He was Vice President of Yugoslavia in 1953; in 1954 he lost his position, he was arrested, he continued to write, to speak, to give interviews, and so on. So one of the most important differences is that dissidents—Djilas was the first—continued to live in their countries but used Western public opinion as an instrument in their "struggle from the inside." Even Trotsky did this.

The difference between the dissident movement and opposition in right-wing dictatorships is not so crucial, but in general, it reflects the difference between authoritarian and totalitarian countries. In authoritarian countries there is generally a terrible limitation of freedom. But in totalitarian countries up to ten years ago (and still today in China), there have been "active unfreedoms"; not only are you limited in what you *can* do, but you also *have* to do some things that you don't like. And so, to be passive in the Soviet Union—in a totalitarian country—is sometimes to be a revolutionary, and you can't say the same about authoritarian countries.

In answer to the third question, about an international movement, looking at Solidarity and its proclaimed goals—amnesty of political prisoners, freedom of press, free trade unions, and everything else—none of these has anything to do with Polish nationalism in any sense, and national independence is only a precondition for international goals; that is, for democracy. And so the dissidents' movement is really the new Internationale.

AMY KAUFMANN: I am a member of Amnesty International, where I coedit the newsletter that goes out to groups working on behalf of political prisoners in the Soviet Union. And I am also friendly with an émigré family here in Cambridge, who are disappointed with what they've found here; they don't like their lives here. One of them would like to write, but, as the Rumanian gentleman said, it's too difficult for Russians to write in English. I'm starting a magazine here in Boston, and I know many other editors who are very eager to get material written by

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émigrés. I would like to encourage all the émigrés here to get in touch with translators, with people who are willing to help them, to edit their work. I believe they would have a very ready market for fiction and for any kind of literature about their experience. Thank you.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: Thank you for your suggestions. We have time for one or two more comments.

RUSS LIVINGSTON: I am a student here in town at Boston University. I came to hear a little about writing in closed and open societies, which I guess means writing and *thinking* in open and closed societies. We heard a little about writing in closed societies, and I'm sympathetic to the need for free consciousness or the right to express oneself. I'm curious, though, as to whether you want to assert that the Western world is open. And if you do, what do you mean by the term *open society*? You talked about the KGB and censorship, and we have the equivalent: the CIA, and a more passive sort of censorship—our media. As for this joke about *Pravda*, in lots of circles here one could easily substitute the *New York Times*. We have a culture that insulates us as well; our primary form of experiencing, of taking in our world, is television. Do you consider this an open form of expression?

PAVEL LITVINOV: This is a big question; I'll try to be brief. I have lived in this country for eight years, after having lived for thirty-four years in the Soviet Union, and in my opinion this society is as free and open as it is possible for any society to be on the level of today's civilization. You talk about the FBI and the CIA and about certain distortions in the *New York Times* that I know about. Of course abuses of power are bad, but to understand the difference, imagine a society where the CIA, the FBI, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, General Motors, General Electric, Hollywood, and all possible organizations were all controlled from one center and had one common censorship. Likewise, all those small organizations that have dissenting opinions—including the American Communist Party or any other group—all of them also controlled from one center completely and having only one opinion. Can you understand the difference? I could give you many more examples.

EFIM ETKIND: I am not inclined to idealize the Western world, but I call it an open and democratic society—if only because yes-

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terday I came from France, where there is a socialist government, to the United States of America, where the government and the President are far from socialist, and I was admitted without any questionnaires, I was not checked on for three months before I left, I was not required to have a Party recommendation, and other meetings were not held so that later I would not be granted a visa, so that I would not be able to come from France to the United States. I am inclined to call this an open and democratic society, because the person who asked this question will be able to leave this auditorium freely, without fear that two men in civilian clothes will be waiting for him outside, put him in a car, and take him away to a *known* destination. I could cite many other differences. As I said earlier, the two literatures demonstrate that these two societies are opposities. They have been called open and closed. Perhaps it is more accurate to call them democratic and totalitarian.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: I want to thank the panelists and the audience.

*Coming in*
**PARTISAN REVIEW**

A discussion of the current political situation by the Editorial Board of *Partisan Review* and others will be published in coming issues.

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# FICTION

## Thalia Selz

## THE MONK WHO LOVED LITTLE GIRLS

Athos wasn't born Athos at all. His parents were a couple of vaudeville troupers named Sally Sparks and Archie Anderson. She played the ingenue, the Irish maid, the blushing bride and the slattern wife. He was a song-and-dance man who could juggle and do trick roping like Will Rogers; he played blackface, cowboy, and dumb Swede, as well as the male counterparts to his wife's roles. For a while when he was three Athos really thought his parents' first names were Bridget and Paddy.

Because the baby was born in Hartford, Connecticut, during a brief stopover between shows, they named him Hartford, but he didn't stay there long enough to pick up anything but his name. By the time he was nine years old he had been in twenty-one schools.

They were playing in Denver when Hartford stopped speaking. One day in class when he was concentrating on his civics lesson with one part of his mind and pretending to be Mr. Aladdin in *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* with the other part of his mind, Miss Taylor asked him how many officials the State of Colorado had duly elected to serve in the United States Senate and the House of Representatives . . . Please.

"Two senators and five congressmen, ma'am," one part of Hartford's mind stated loudly, but the other part of his mind spoke louder still: "My darling little girl Rebecca, when you grow up or I grow down we are both going to marry each other and live happily ever after. In Hartford, Connecticut—not in Denver."

"Hartford?" said Miss Taylor.

Hartford realized he had not yet answered Miss Taylor, who was large and impressive, whose voice was *basso profundo,* who had a delicate mustache and hairs growing out of her chin, who hennaed her hair except for the roots which were somehow always green like grass under melting red snow, and who was dying of cancer though neither she nor Hartford knew it yet

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(Hartford was never to know). He gazed at her unblinkingly, thought of Rebecca lying in a trundle bed in her cold little attic, and said nothing. Perhaps if he had known Miss Taylor was beginning to die, he might have decided to make her last two years easier by giving her the answer, but perhaps not. After all, he knew as well as the rest of the class that Miss Taylor herself knew the answer and was only hoping to trip him up, so as to make herself look better. At least, that was what Hartford thought all teachers were up to. So he said nothing.

"Hartford!" Miss Taylor's voice became *basso* extra-*profundo*. "I am surprised at you!" She sighed. Until this moment Hartford had been the smartest pupil in her class—for the five weeks he had been there, that is. Miss Taylor appreciated his smartness and felt sorry for his wooden loneliness—it was hard on a child to have to go from town to town and school to school. And that mother of his, when she first had showed up with him! Dressed in a peek-a-boo shirtwaist that showed her bare arms through the eyelet embroidery. And rouge! Miss Taylor thought of the dim red stains she had found on her underthings between periods and decided she must be starting to go through the changes. Early, as her mother had. She gazed into Hartford's peaked, closed-up face and decided not to make him wear the dunce cap and stand in the corner. It was simply too much trouble, and she didn't feel well that day.

For his part, Hartford decided then and there that he would never answer again. Not in class, anyhow. It had something to do with the way Miss Taylor had sighed and let her eyes slide away from him, as if she didn't want to see him sitting there silently, knowing the answers as well as she did but refusing to say them back to her, his own man even if she were twice as big as he. But it had even more to do with the fact that she hadn't put the dunce cap on him and sent him into the corner, as she did the other children when they wouldn't recite. It was just as if she were siding with the children, then, in setting him off as special:

"Your name's a town, not a person!"

"Fartford, Fartford . . . yah, yah, yah!"

"My ma says she bets your ma shows her underwear on the stage." So he would *be* special. He wouldn't talk. He gave himself up to his fantasies.

Off and on his folks did skits from *Rebecca of Sunnybrook*

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*Farm* or *Salvation Nell* when the manager wanted "something with real dramatic interpretation," and Hartford would dream Rebecca or Nell, "the saved girl of the slums" with the "look of dawn" and her "voice of spring." (He read the reviews.) Sometimes he put himself in the dream; sometimes he didn't. He might be Mr. Aladdin, turning up at the last moment to rescue darling Rebecca, or he might watch dainty Nell being brutalized in a barroom. Miss Taylor began yelling at him or sending him downstairs to the principal's office. The little girls in his class tossed their pigtails and called him "dummy." Then he *couldn't* speak. It had dried up inside him. His parents pulled him out of school.

Hartford hid in the library. There was always a town library wherever there was a playhouse, and the boy had been using libraries since he was six. He had taught himself to read at three with the books and magazines lying around hotel lobbies, and he could coach his parents in their lines by the time he was five. So he was used to books, and he liked them. They didn't ask questions; they answered them, and Hartford had a lot of questions. The books told him about Shakespeare and crystalline structure and metempsychosis, about the Children's Crusade and the paradox frog and La Dore's Bust Food.

The librarian—it was always a middle-aged female in a green or brown baize walking skirt with hair the color of tree bark and the marks already upon her of old maidhood—would come clicking up to him as he sat reading at a library table. "Little boy, why aren't you in school?"

No answer. Hartford stared at the book—*Hallam's Middle Ages*—held upright upon the table before him.

"Where is your mother?"

No answer. Hartford couldn't have answered, anyway, because he was holding his breath for fear of disturbing the very delicate equilibrium which had allowed him to enter the library and remove from its shelves this mysterious book with its stiff, powdery brown binding, its end-papers patterned like birds' wings in red, yellow and blue, its foxed flyleaf upon which someone had written in brown ink what looked like "E. Moff" but was actually "E. Moss" and underneath the signature "Oct$^{br}$ 21.1853." How incredibly ancient E. Moss must have been in 1853—the year after the book was printed—to have written his or

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her name with those old-fashioned script esses. Why, thought Hartford, I bet—in his thoughts he allowed himself the vernacular—E. Moss was born around the Revolutionary War!

"Little boy, I asked you a question!" The librarian peered down over Hartford's shoulder, expecting to see *Nick Carter, Detective* or at the very best, *The Prince and the Pauper.* But when she saw *Hallam's Middle Ages* open at page 463, she took a step back and, removing her glasses for better long-distance vision, stared at Hartford as if he were a rare phenomenon of nature: a two-headed calf or a crocus coming up in November. Then her gaze softened. A *boy* who really *liked* to read!

She sighed sharply, gave the braided buns over her ears a quick pat to tuck in loose hairpins, and walked back to her file cards, making metallic, no-nonsense noises with her heels so that the boy would be sure not to draw in the book or let his hand wander too close to the buttons on his fly.

Meanwhile, Hartford was reading the note at the bottom of page 463.

*The most singular effect of this crusading spirit was witnessed in 1211, when a multitude, amounting, as some say, to 90,000, chiefly composed of children, and commanded by a child, set out for the purpose of recovering the Holy Land. They came for the most part from Germany, and reached Genoa without harm. But finding there an obstacle which their imperfect knowledge of geography had not anticipated, they soon dispersed in various directions. Thirty thousand arrived at Marseilles, where part were murdered, part probably starved, and the rest sold to the Saracens.*

When he had stopped holding his breath he could have answered the librarian well enough, for his voice had come back; indeed, it had come back better than ever because, as if out of nowhere, it had come back to him full of declensions and conjugations, but it was hard to find information on the Children's Crusade, and he didn't want to risk saying something that would persuade the librarian to call the truant officer. For a few weeks now he had been reading Sir Walter Scott and Turgenev and Charlotte Brontë, but walking past a shelf and catching sight of the golden-brown binding, he had plucked down this book and turned to the index in the hope that it might contain a reference to that pitiful campaign which fascinated him far more than the

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perils of Rowena and Rebecca or what Jane Eyre might stumble upon in the remote recesses of Mr. Rochester's country house. For he liked to sit back and imagine all his classmates—what seemed like years and years and years of children in one- and two-room schoolhouses and ancient three-story brick warrens with peeling green walls and stinking urinals—thousands of boys in knickers and girls in pinafores—being marched off to the Children's Crusade till they got kidnapped and sold into slavery in Venice and Marseilles. But gradually the dream changed till only the boys were kidnapped because Hartford would rush in with a sword to rescue the girls, and then the dream changed again so that the boys attacked the girls with swords and spears (the boys said "attackt" and "speahs" because by that time he was reading in a library with stained glass windows in Brooklyn) while he fought them all off single-handed with a long pike.

Hartford learned French because it was the language of Stephen, the shepherd boy who led forth the Children's Crusade. After French it was easy to pick up Italian and Spanish. German came harder, but it was the language of Nicolas, the child who gathered twenty thousand other children in Germany to seek the Holy Sepulchre. And he liked the way German let you put words together to make other words; he liked that about Greek, too. At first, he only learned ancient Greek. He went on to Russian and Latin when he was fifteen, playing around with Sanskrit because it provided the etymological links to Indo-European and because he wanted to read the *Vedas* in the original. Also, he thought he *ought* to know Sanskrit because it would make Bengali accessible. He learned Hebrew and Arabic and some Gaelic (his mother's people were Irish). Languages varied greatly in difficulty, but he soon realized that he was using the same system to learn all of them. He would get a grammar and a dictionary and leaf through each, trying to see the language as a whole, visually, as if he were looking at a building and seeing simultaneously its facade, sidewalls, and roof; its foundations and basement; its floors and staircases and elevator shafts. It was as though he could see at one time the groundplan and elevation of the language, going on later to details of joists and gutters and ornament. Sometimes, if it were a very simple dialect with whose parent language he was already familiar, he would see it in a flash, could learn it, literally, in a day.

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If a language were extremely difficult—like Japanese—or if he had little opportunity to read it—like Farsi—or if he didn't care for the sound of it—like Flemish—he would content himself with picking up a smattering. Enough so that it would not look or sound utterly strange to him. (But by this time virtually no language seemed utterly strange to him. Only the Finno-Ugric languages for a while mystified and intrigued him as something alien, metallic, from another star. But in time he learned some Hungarian, a little Estonian, Finnish.)

He rarely forgot what he learned. His memory seemed infinitely expandable, a kind of universe with languages and their dialects like solar systems and galaxies spreading away and away through the vast reaches of his cerebellum. Someday Pano would tell him he had a photographic memory.

Meanwhile, he daydreamed about battalions of Adorables (he had begun to call the little girls that in his fantasies), all dressed in silk and cloth of gold. Tiny saints, they marched southward over the Alps and through Hartford's brain cells into Genoa, where he watched spellbound as Saracens with Brooklyn accents kidnapped them, yelling and yanking their curls and throwing dead garter snakes at their silken rags.

Sometimes a Saracen would strip off an Adorable's gown and tie her spread-eagled in her pantywaist and bloomers on a plank and prepare to stick pins or knives in her (it made Hartford's skin hot to think of it), and just as she was about to die a martyr's death, up he would dash, smiting the Saracens with their own swords and slashing the ropes that bound his suffering Adorable.

If he was actually asleep and dreaming in his own bed (whatever rooming house bed happened to be his in the town his parents were playing that night), he would always wake up at this moment in the dream and scramble out of bed and stumble down the hall to the single bathroom that served the entire floor. And there, in the urine-yellow light of the single bulb, he would wash all that shameful white stuff off his privates.

One day in 1915, when Hartford was eighteen years old, he came home from the library to the cheap hotel his folks were staying in while they played in Cincinnati. A paddy wagon was pulling away from the curb as he climbed the front steps and walked into the lobby. The desk clerk looked embarrassed while

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he handed him his key; then, with his hand still on the desk blotter, the clerk leaned toward him and whispered, "Your ma's sick; the police just took her and your pa to the hospital."

In fact, she was dead. She had died a few seconds earlier, in the back of the paddy wagon, and when her husband, who was sitting beside the stretcher, sensed it and pounded on the barred window behind the driver's seat, the police veered about and drove to the morgue instead. To Hartford's surprise, the name on the death certificate read *Bridget Anderson.* She really had been named Bridget, after all.

A few months after his mother's death he was stamping the date on a library card—for by this time he was working in a branch library in St. Louis, where his father was trying to find work as a solo—when a short, middle-aged woman with black hair and eyes asked him if they had any Greek books. Carefully trying not to notice the plump bosom showing in a dusky, golden hemicircle above her bodice, Hartford led the way back to the shelves which bore the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey,* the odes of Pindar, the complete extant plays of Euripides but no Aristophanes (whom the Library Board deemed shockingly vulgar), the history of the Peloponnesian Wars, the *Anabasis,* Aristotle's *Poetics* and Plato's *Apology* and *Crito,* all in the original Greek.

"I'm sorry. That's all we have," mumbled Hartford in his own *apologia,* abashed to discover that if he didn't gaze at her bosom, he would have to look into a boldly pretty face or down at her skirt which, though descending modestly to her ankles in the fashion of the day, must certainly conceal her privates. Hartford was even more afraid to look at her face than her bosom, but staring at all those layers of black poplin over her privates was out of the question, so his eyes settled helplessly on the bosom.

*"Ochee!"* said the lady, vigorously throwing her head back in what he was later to learn was the Greek gesture of denial. "This the ancient Greek. I want it the modern Greek."

Her name was Mrs. Nausicaa Paleologos. She was thirty-five years old and a widow. What else did Hartford need? He hadn't known he needed those things until the sum total of those things took him to a Greek ice cream parlor where she drank "Greek" (actually Turkish) coffee while Hartford ate a double strawberry sundae swathed in whipped cream, draped in nuts, and crowned with a maraschino cherry.

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"Did you know that the ice cream sundae was invented in a Greek ice cream parlor in Chicago?" Hartford still couldn't look much above that bosom, but he could talk. He grew so excited by her name that he couldn't *stop* talking. "Nausicaa was the princess who found Odysseus on the shore when he was shipwrecked. I've read the *Odyssey* in the original. Yes. And Paleologos. Is that *really* your last name?"

Mrs. Nausicaa laughed hoarsely, leaned back from her third cup of coffee, and gazed at Hartford much as a true gourmande gazes upon a dish of freshly picked mushrooms, sauteed in real butter and lightly sprinkled with lemon juice. There *was* something mushroomlike about him, as though he had grown in some shady, damp spot. His skin was extremely pale, and she liked the delicate gold of his hair, exactly as if it had been fried in butter for a few minutes.

Paleologos was the name of her deceased husband, but she let that go for the present. Hartford, however, was not about to let it go. "The last Byzantine emperor was named Constantine Paleologos." He was still at an age when he liked to show off his knowledge; later he would become shy and refuse to divulge any of his vast store unless someone he trusted asked him or unless someone—anyone—said something contrary to fact. "He's supposed to have died fighting in the streets on that day—Tuesday, April 29, 1452." How proud he was that he remembered the precise date, though it would not have made him proud at seven-thirty that morning when he left his rooming house for the library. His pride had something to do with that mounded bosom swelling tawnily above the black bodice—for Mrs. Nausicaa was, of course, in mourning—with the chortling laugh that issued from it, with the black hair swept up into a glossy bun but curled entrancingly over her forehead and her ears, with the big black eyes that watched him with sleepy care from under half-closed lids. Once in a while when he dared to dart a glance upward, something flared in those eyes. This was flattering. To his knowledge, which though immense had certain significant gaps, Hartford had never been flared at in that way before. He liked it, and he found he wanted more.

So did Mrs. Nausicaa. After a band concert and a visit to the theatre to watch his father perform, Mrs. Nausicaa decided that she liked 'Artford enough to invite him to her neat little bun-

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galow for coffee and *ghalaktombóuriko* and that she'd better invite him soon because no telling when his *patéra,* who had grown too arthritic and sad to twirl his Will Rogers lassoo with the requisite speed and élan, might be fired and have to move on to one of the lesser towns on the vaudeville circuit.

Accordingly, Hartford found himself one Sunday afternoon about three sitting in a tiny parlor, perhaps eight by ten, furnished with: a small organ in an oak case, a Turkish leather couch and rocker, a glass bordeau lamp decorated with drooping pyramids of chartreuse grapes, a deluxe talking machine with a horn as big, Hartford thought, as the open mouth of a hippopotamus, a flowered Persian carpet from Sears, and an imported palm plant, also from Sears. There were other odds and ends to engage his eyes and his already cramped limbs such as a rope portiere, a stereoscope with a set of slides, a fan, several velvet cushions, and a large framed photograph of Mrs. Nausicaa and the late Mr. Paleologos on their wedding day. Hartford balanced a plate of *ghalaktombóuriko* on his lap and wondered how to eat the dense pastry without getting the flaky *fíllo* stuck to his nose. He had already learned several hundred modern Greek words from Mrs. Nausicaa, however, as though by osmosis, and he figured he could learn to eat *ghalaktombóuriko* almost as easily.

(Chuckle, chuckle) chuckled Mrs. Nausicaa, divining the question in his mind, and with a lacy napkin embroidered by herself for the dowry she had brought Mr. Paleologos, she boldly wiped the tip of Hartford's adorable neat little Anglo-Saxon nose, so different from the impressive and frequently scimitar-shaped noses of her countrymen.

To flick the *fíllo* off his nose she had been forced to move right up next to him on the Turkish leather couch. "'Artford," gurgled Mrs. Nausicaa, "you have the sweet nose. I kiss."

Hartford, who was holding the plate of *ghalaktombóuriko* with one hand and the handle of the stereoscope with the other, impulsively dropped the stereoscope upon the Persian carpet and grabbed a pillow of painted purple velvet bearing a scene of the Parthenon in Athens, Greece. The stereoscope tinkled multitudinously with the sound of its breaking glass intestines.

"Oh my gracious," gasped Hartford, "and I wanted to see those slides of the Acropolis, too!"

"*Óchee!*" commanded Mrs. Nausicaa, her voice becoming

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deeper by the split second as her little hand with its fat gold wedding band groped toward Hartford's fly. "We see this things, *agápimou!*" Passion no doubt driving her back upon her native tongue which she promptly shoved between Hartford's astonished teeth, in what he recognized as a French kiss, having read about them in contraband English novels.

Hartford was, therefore, even more astonished than his teeth, for how could a Greek immigrant housewife know about such depraved practices as the French kiss? But before he could do more than formulate such a question, he found himself lying supine upon the Turkish leather couch, the plate of *ghalaktombóuriko* safely wafted away by Eros, no doubt, and Mrs. Nausicaa twining horizontally along one side of him, rather like the grape-vine depicted upon her bordeau lamp, while she gently and almost accidentally, as it were, stroked the woolen worsted over his privates.

This was the first time Hartford had been touched by any woman other than his mother or an occasional teacher. He had masturbated as a little boy, until he learned that it was filthy, evil, and likely to rot his brain, whereupon he had forced himself to stop. He dreamed those dreams, of course, but one couldn't really help one's dreams, and besides, the females he dreamed about were as little as he always was in his dreams, and all they did was suffer while he fought the Saracens with pikes and swords. And he *always* washed his privates off when a dream woke him up. But his privates seemed to have a will of their own under Mrs. Nausicaa's accidental brushing of them. They bunched together and humped up and stood upon end and before Hartford could do more than squeak protestingly under his hostess' pretty lips clamped to his own, they erupted that nasty stuff like egg white, and Hartford was ready to die or run away, but Mrs. Nausicaa shoved him firmly back down upon the divan and swiftly unfastened both his fly and then his trousers and while he kept his eyes tight shut in horror, seemed to have got her skirts up about her waist and her underclothing off, till she was straddling him and forcing his privates—rigid once more—into the hairy, velvety embrace of her own privates.

And then Mrs. Nausicaa began to growl. At the deep, gutteral sounds issuing from that feminine throat, and then the yelp which followed as Mrs. Nausicaa convulsed upon his chest,

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gripping his sides with her thighs, Hartford became so terrified that his penis—in sheer panic—leaped again and again inside her vagina. He screamed but whether in pleasure or revulsion he couldn't have said then or later.

The following Sunday morning, his benefactress led him to Saint Athanasios and enrolled him in a course of religious instruction. Hartford felt right at home, as though he were simply starting up again where he had left off nine years earlier, for almost all the other pupils were children under ten:

*Q. What means the word, "Catechism"?*
*A. It is a Greek word . . .*

Of course! How comfortable. Hartford Anderson was christened Athos Anderson seven weeks later, moved in the next day with his godmother, Nausicaa Paleologos, and for the rest of his life considered himself, when he thought of it at all, as half-Greek. Athos spoke modern Greek, both the high language and the low, with such fluency and perfection of accent—tinged, however, with the somewhat amusing (to other Greeks) peculiarities of pronunciation found in Arcadia, whence Nausicaa had come—that Greeks when they met him always thought he was a native Greek and attributed his coloring to Arcadian birth—for there are many blue-eyed blondes in the north central Peloponnesus—and his American mannerisms to long years in the States.

Nausicaa never guessed his sexual preferences, for he was fundamentally unaware of them himself and so did not struggle to hide them and so did not lead either one of them to imagine that he was actually more attracted to girls under nine years of age than he was to the voluptuous widow who had all but married him. She was a determined, affectionate woman who sometimes got as far as realizing that her young lover would rather be somewhere else than in her bed; she suspected he preferred his books to her and she was right. He preferred his books to anything, including wet dreams about prenymphets, and when she died suddenly, of a gall-bladder infection, when he was in his twenty-seventh year, he was faintly relieved because his body had begun to let him down occasionally at bedtime, he was tired of going to church, and besides, he still had too many languages to learn.

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Just the same, Athos missed her. It was 1924 and in the next eight years, he drifted through the Greek sections of New Orleans, Charleston, Detroit and Elkhart, Indiana, finally winding up in Chicago because its Greek Town was the largest. He went to coffeehouses and the Greek restaurants and political clubs, though never to church. Perhaps Archie Anderson's Calvinist strain had surfaced in that rejection. When Athos met Pano in 1932, Athos was living on five dollars a week and one meal a day fed him at the back of The Greek Garden by Moscow, whom he had met in the course of a violent political discussion in a *kaffenion*. It was close to election time, there were at least two hundred Greek clubs in the city, and two factions were arguing over how many Greek voters would turn out on voting day.

"Twenty-five thousand," proclaimed a shopkeeper suspected of harboring Republican sympathies.

"Fifty thousand strong!" hissed a furious little man with a couple of teeth missing and a copy of the *Worker* sticking out of his pocket.

"I come from Pylos where I was raised in the tradition of the great Homer and the wise councillor, Nestor, and you would do well to listen to me. Twenty-five thousand," said the shopkeeper.

"I come from Salonika where we learned to distrust the imperialist, warmongering assertions of the Mycenean ruling-class and its corrupt descendants. Fifty thousand Hellenic helots will rise and march to the polls in November to elect Franklin Delano Roosevelt president of the United States of America!"

Athos, who was going to vote for Herbert Hoover (Archie Anderson again) but who was scrupulously honest and about as politically emotional as a lamb chop, said that while he had read both figures in the daily papers, the latter seemed to be based on a non-partisan examination of voter registration records, so he would assume that it was more nearly correct.

"A Solon is in our midst," declared the little man whose English was so poor that he read the *Worker* only with the greatest difficulty but who *was* a worker—a waiter, to be exact—and thought it not unreasonable to display the badge of his trade as well as his political affiliation, and he beamed at Athos. Delicately divining that Solon needed a meal, Moscow dragged Athos down the street to The Greek Garden, seated him at a table

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in the back, and stuffed him full of *dolmãdes* while he tried valiantly but without success then and for the rest of their friendship, which lasted until one of them died, to teach Athos a new catechism.

One Saturday evening shortly after Franklin Delano Roosevelt had been elected President, Athos was sitting in his usual chair back near the kitchen and loudly slurping up his courtesy-of-the-house egg-lemon soup. He had no table manners because his parents had never taken the time to teach him any; if they had been asked why and had been able to articulate the reason, they would have said that they were concentrating on more important matters than the *manner* in which the boy ate; they were trying to make sure that he had food to eat. Athos was eating with his usual sucking and smacking noises, rather like those a very large baby would make, and trying to read the Greek newspaper Moscow had saved for him when he gradually became aware that something else was vying for his attention—namely the loud voice of a man with thick black hair that hung below his ears and a nose whose mild but definite arch reminded Athos of pictures he had seen of the new George Washington Bridge in New York City. The man was holding forth at a long table, and he was making so much noise that Athos found it hard to concentrate on his newspaper. He had never got over his fondness for libraries and his librarian habits, and shy though he was, he almost got up to tell the fellow to be quiet so that other people could read. And of course eat.

There was a pretty woman sitting beside the man. She wore a felt hat with a brim, but when she turned Athos could see that she had narrow hazel eyes and a high color in her cheeks, probably from the bitter north wind now sweeping down Halsted Street bearing the first snows of winter. Athos shivered and glanced up at his thin woolen coat hanging on a hook beside his table. He wished he could find money for a new second-hand winter coat in one of the shops over on Maxwell Street and a pair of rubber galoshes, too. When he curled his toes inside his shoes he could feel the rough edges of the cardboard soles he had cut to the shape of his feet and slipped inside his shoes so he wouldn't have to worry about where to find the money for resoling them just yet. Tomorrow would be the first of the month, when the rent on his furnished room was due. Where could he get that five

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dollars? He wouldn't ask Moscow, who already was openly feeding him one square meal a day, who sneaked him leftovers from the kitchen, and could hardly afford, on a salary of twelve dollars a week, to pay his *own* rent. Athos had combed the want ads and walked the streets every day the weather was decent to hunt for work, but who wanted librarians or translators when what everybody desperately needed was food? clothes? shelter? After all, even he couldn't eat a book. And now with the bad weather bearing down, job-hunting would be much harder because of his poor coat and worn-out shoes. Money for carfare was out; there wasn't any. It would be almost easier to walk out into the storm, catch pneumonia and be taken to the County Hospital. He might die, but at least he would die in a clean bed in a warm ward.

"Banks are closing right and left," the man was shouting in Greek. "We have thirteen million unemployed and that fornicator Hoover is still saying 'business as usual.' Where am I going to find the food to put in my daughter's mouth between now and March when FDR takes office? I carried her on my shoulders in the torchlight parade the night he won, but I'm carrying two mortgages on my property, I'm still being paid in scrip half the time, and though I work fifteen hours a day in my laboratory, the only steady requests are from bootleggers and sons of bitches who want to dope the horses."

Somebody else at the table spoke, and the man with the long hair shouted back, *"Óchee!* I'm not Saint Panayotis, but you do not dishonor your work. How could I look into the eyes of my child if I filled with narcotics and stimulants hypodermics for horses? It is well that everybody should know this about me because some of the requests have come from down here," and he jerked his head toward the door that opened onto Halsted Street.

A small arm reached toward the bread basket in front of the man with the loud voice, and for the first time Athos became aware that a child was sitting on the other side of him. By craning he could make out a little girl of six or seven with puffy shadows under her eyes and a morose look.

"Here, *pethimou,*" the man said. "Eat!" He handed her a chunk of bread, but she broke off only a tiny fragment to put into her mouth. *"Féta?"* the man insisted. "Olives?"

The child shook her head, and Athos realized that she

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would probably rather be playing than listening to her father shout. He wondered what games she would play: House, perhaps, and Doctor and maybe Cowboys and Indians, though he himself did not think little girls ought to play Cowboys and Indians which was a game for rough little boys. Would she like to play Children's Crusade? He imagined himself playing with her: she with her dark curls and sulky eyes dressed in a ragged red gown, marching with thousands of other children across the Alps and down to Venice, where evil pirates and Doges lure them onto huge gondolas. The little girl is manacled in a long line with other little girls; they are going to be sold into slavery, when suddenly he appears, in the very prow of her gondola, waving an immense pike with which to rescue her—

The man was off on another tangent now. Something about amino acids and the work being done by the Germans. "I need somebody to translate," the man was shouting. "Maude can read German, but the chemical terminology she doesn't know it."

Athos half-rose in his chair, but Moscow, who was swooping around the long table with plates of lamb and okra stew leaned down to whisper in the man's ear; then he nodded toward Athos. The man looked around immediately, and Athos found himself the target of a long, curious stare. Then the man stood up and walked toward Athos with short, quick steps rather odd for such a thin, long-legged man. He was tall for a Greek and bony. A big head with a massive, slightly bulging forehead and that nose.

Athos didn't know whether to sit or stand, so he remained in a half-crouching position with his napkin held over his fly. The man approaching him, meanwhile, was holding his linen napkin over *his* fly. It wasn't that their flys were open; it was because each of them was in such a hurry to meet the other that they came as they were, like a certain kind of costume party.

*"Ti káhnyis,"* the man said "I am called Panayotis Rigas." He leaned over the table to shake Athos's hand. Athos mumbled his own name and leaned over to shake Pano's hand, and they bumped foreheads smartly. Athos could smell the chemicals on the man: warm red and brown smells mixed with an acrid purple smell. Frank, scientific smells that made Athos think of laboratories and hard, useful work.

He rubbed his forehead, but the man seemed hardly to feel

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the bump, maybe because his forehead was already rather bumpy as if the cranium beneath had been molded by a potter who was just beginning to learn his craft.

"I need a translator," the man said in Greek. "With your permission—" and he sat down in the chair beside Athos. The chair sagged slightly and collapsed.

It was so much like his parents' vaudeville routines, that for one crazy moment Athos wondered if Panayotis Rigas had rehearsed it all ahead of time. An instant later he was filled with panic, for the fellow was glaring up at him from the splintered rubble of the flimsy Thonet chair as if Athos had sawed it apart and then carefully reglued it so that it would be sure to burst into smithereens at the slightest pressure. He wasn't a heavy man at all, but he was abrupt and forceful in his movements, and he could hardly have known that the most rickety furniture was reserved for the rear of the restaurant where the waiters and charity cases like Athos took their meals. Now Rigas would never hire him!

"*Ghamó tou keratâs!*" Rigas growled. "Go screw your cuckold!"

Athos leaned down to give him a hand and felt how heavy the man's bones were. No wonder the chair had snapped to pieces. Rigas leaned forward and with his free hand grasped the table leg for additional support.

"No, no!" cried Athos, but it was already too late. Like the ghost to the tomb, like the child to the womb, it collapsed and unbuilded again. Delicately the table teetered on its legs, and then they folded under it as smoothly as if they had been hinged, with only little cracking noises to tell of nails being ripped from holes, splinters from legs. The entire assemblage—table, linen spattered with tomato sauce, silver and glassware, newspaper and dishes, including a half-full bowl of egg-lemon soup—came down upon Rigas like the wolf on the fold. Athos wasn't thinking of Byron just then, but Maude, for some inexplicable reason, *was*, and she could never recall that improbable scene in the restaurant without Byron's anapests galloping through her head. After all, she had been secretary of the Ladies' Literary Society at Oberlin for three years.

But Pano was no lamb. "Go sleep with Christ and the Holy

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Virgin," he bellowed to no one in particular. "Will you behold this which it has been done to me?"

*"Kýrie!"* Moscow was crying, flapping around him with towels. "I am in despair. Grant me pardon!"

"Why should you be given words of justification?" Pano declaimed from the floor, plucking a fork from his tie and trying to wipe the soup off his trousers with a corner of the tablecloth. "Is this how you treat the troubled of the earth, seating them upon sticks and serving them upon rubber tables? Are they not crucified enough, being without work and having to come here for handouts? One who has skills and can translate, as you tell me, even from the Sanskrit? Tell me," he said in suddenly quite level tones to Athos, while taking an olive from his vest pocket and emptying the salt from his trouser cuffs, "has Romany ever been written down?"

At last someone was coming to *him* to learn. "Well," drawled Athos in English, for the question had been asked in English, "that depends which dialect you mean. Now there's a book that came out seven years ago on the dialect of the Welsh gypsies that's very good, and several older ones by the Germans and the French on the Armenian and Slovak and so forth gypsy dialects, but if you want the Greek—"

He was about to cite the work of a scholar who lived in the Epirus but whose as yet unpublished Greek-Romany dictionary he had learned of by means of a footnote in a review of S.C.J. Popp's recent *Les Tsiganes, histoire, ethnographie, linguistique, grammaire, dictionnaire,* when he became aware that Moscow was almost in tears. He had his hands under Pano Rigas' armpits and was trying to heave him up from the floor, where Pano was however, so engrossed in listening to Athos that he was actually trying to push Moscow away, an act which Moscow apparently interpreted as one of the sheerest antagonism, for suddenly releasing Pano Rigas, he dropped upon one knee beside him, as though protocol required that he be upon the same level as his patron. *"Kýrie,* I seek that you do me a favor. Pray, do not refuse me. This gentleman is my friend. Constantly we conduct serious discussions concerned with the class struggle and the future of the world revolution. To my sadness, my dear friend clings obstinately to the reactionary principles of a backward,

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decadent class, but never relaxing my vigilance, I struggle to educate him. Yet I am in a great sorrow that you are offended and traumatized—"

"*Skáhseh, vrèh!* Shut up!" Pano Rigas said. "Let us have the people's democratic revolution tomorrow, if you wish. I am a peasant. I do not care. But now we conduct a serious linguistic discussion concerned with the derivation of a language and its struggle to survive." Shifting to hands and knees, he stood up quickly and brushed the bread crumbs off his trousers. "Romany is the language of the *gýfti* and a descendant of the Sanskrit, which I had it this information, but that it can be written, I did not know."

Athos, together with Moscow, was now trying to prop up the table. "The most borrowings," he explained, gingerly fitting a leg into its joint, "seem to be from the Greek—"

"Exactly as I thought!" Pano shouted triumphantly. "Did you heard it, Maude?" (Athos realized that Pano Rigas had his own problems with linguistic survival.) "Now if my daughter, who has always her nose in a book, should show an interest, as we say it, in etymology and becomes train-ed in Greek, which it will not be difficult considering her heritage, she can become a scholar and pursue it her Ph.D. in linguistic studies with emphasis upon Romany and its relation to Greek—"

"Yes, dear," Maude said. For the past five minutes she had been crouching in the aisle, gathering together little piles of shattered crockery and scattered silverware, and she was hardly listening to the men. Her Greek was not yet good enough to understand more than the general drift of most conversations, and she did *wish* Pano wouldn't shout so.

The child stared soberly at the whole turbulent scene. She was beginning to go through a noneating stage in which she found both the sight and the odors of food faintly nauseating, and all that spilled soup and flying bread, smooth black olives rolling about the carpet in puddles of olive oil and vinegar from the broken cruets, celery and carrot sticks tossed around like straws: the whole mess was disgusting to her though she couldn't have found the words yet to say so. Worse still, she knew that soon she would be pressured, because of "the starving Russian children," to eat her lamb and the okra which she hated, though what lamb and okra had to do with starving Russian

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children she never could figure out. She knew her father was predicting her future, as usual, and that as usual it had something to do with being Greek, and if there was one thing she had long ago decided, sometime way back in her second or third year (though she couldn't have specified the time had anyone known enough to ask), it was that she was not going to be Greek. She didn't know exactly how she would manage, but she knew it just the same. She wasn't going to be anything her father with his racket and rumpus wanted her to be, and that was that.

Athos, on the other hand, knew that at last he could be something someone he respected wanted him to be. Sally Sparks and Archie Anderson had loved him, but they had never had time or inclination to know what went on in his head. Mrs. Nausicaa Paleologos had cared only what went on at the other end of him. Moscow was his loyal friend, but Moscow was always trying to reform him. Here at last was someone who needed his services, rather like Nausicaa but in a very different area of skill, an area which was far more congenial to Athos. And someone who could be a friend, too; that much was pretty clear to Athos Hartford Anderson as he rode home in a decrepit automobile with Pano and Maude and the little girl with the unhealthy shadows under her eyes. She was an additional reason for his going home with them, but Athos didn't quite dare admit it to himself just yet. Anyhow, what were most important were food and bed and the etymological discussions for which he could pay by translating scientific abstracts and in return for which he would—thank god—not have to go to church, for he had known from the very moment he had laid eyes on the little triumvirate at the long table that they were not a churchgoing family.

Athos was to enter a Greek church only one more time in his life, in July of 1942, but in Moscow, his best friend, and in Pano and Maude, his benefactors, he had found those who performed what that church calls the seven corporal works of mercy: to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to visit and ransom captives, to harbor the harborless, to visit the sick, and finally—that afternoon in July of 'Forty-two—to bury the dead.

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**Glenway Wescott**

# A SUCCESSION OF POETS

I began life as a poet but was always somewhat inarticulate in verse, and in due course ceased and desisted. Which is not my theme. Early in my lifetime I met various writers of verse far superior to myself, especially two, and this essay is to express something that has been in my mind more and more of late: a sort of mystique of the literary life as worth living for its own sake, on whatever terms, with or without self-satisfaction. It is about slight encounters with poets from 1921 on; myself as a would-be poet somewhat omnipresent, but in the periphery or in a corner, like the donor in a religious picture kneeling in admiration, or later on, keeping an intense professional and vocational watch upon my elders and betters, spying out secrets of their poetical art, patterns of their mentality.

Summer 1957 the MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, New Hampshire, celebrated its fiftieth anniversary, and upon that occasion awarded its Gold Medal to the beloved octogenarian, Marianne Moore. I was asked to make an informal address of presentation. Gladly undertaking to do this, I did not stop to think that I should be speaking in Miss Moore's presence. In a large blue and yellow tent we sat side by side on the platform. Captain John Warner Moore, the poet's aged seafaring brother, and his wife and his daughter, were also at hand. Furthermore there were eminent creative and academic personages, and a larger number of familiar friends than I care to see in any audience. The festive atmosphere filled me with anxious emotions. And even as I spoke, I found myself assailed by extraordinary additional little memories, forty years back and in between, and ever since have wanted to do more justice to them and to my famous poet friend than I did that day.

That was my second visit to the MacDowell Colony. The first was in the summer of 1921, just for a day. On the way from my native Middle West to England and Germany, I was spending some months in a large and rather new log cabin perched up in the woods over West Cummington, Massachusetts, belonging to

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Mrs. William Vaughan Moody, the widow of that academic poet who wrote a popular symbolic play, *The Great Divide,* early in the century. A little way down the mountainside, where the woods petered out, there stood an old two-room cottage—or perhaps I should say, a tidied-up shack—which was William Cullen Bryant's birthplace. Mrs. Moody owned that also, and I used it for my study and wrote the first part of my first novel there. Not long ago someone told me that a young or youngish poet, William Jay Smith, had lately acquired it. It pleases me to ponder this continuity, a century and a half of writers great and small, haunting one place.

Mrs. Moody was the foremost literary hostess in Chicago in the twenties. She also conducted a superior and flourishing catering business, and with its accumulated profits intended to establish a living for poets, that is, for one poet after another, in perpetuity, modeled somewhat upon one of the forms of support of the clergy in olden times in England. Her plan was original: She, with the advice of friends, would select the first poet, who in turn was to pick the second, and so on. No payments of the lifelong windfall would be forthcoming to any of the selected poet's beneficiaries unless and until he had confidentially provided the bank with the name and address of his successor. As it turned out, worst luck, Mrs. Moody suffered a considerable financial loss and let the project drop. Ordinarily, in the twenties, the patronage of literature and the arts was personal and whimsical like that, a far cry from the principles of foundation and estate and federal support in which people have believed more recently.

Edwin Arlington Robinson was a MacDowell colonist that summer of 1921; Frost was to be there as a visitor for a few days; and the Chicago great lady asked me, indeed ordered me, to go over there from West Cummington one of those days, to ascertain what the two well-known poets thought of her scheme. Of course I now realize what did not occur to me at the time—that both of them needed some such support almost desperately.

Frost answered Mrs. Moody's questions unselfishly, helpfully, in depth, in his way, with a certain medicinal bitterness. He didn't like me, but that didn't trouble him, given the purpose of our meeting. What a diplomat he would have made! I didn't like him either, and I remember priding myself just a little on

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the fact that, though I was young, it didn't spoil the occasion for me either.

Robinson, if I remember rightly, was tongue-tied about Mrs. Moody's plan. Just before dinner, in the main sitting room of the colony, I observed him in an unforgettable, miserable circumstance—a revelation to me, of both his personality and life in general, especially literary life.

Some colony conviviality had been planned for after dinner; could it have been a dance? That has slipped my mind. Frost had departed, I think; in any event he wasn't in the sitting room when Robinson entered and sat down. Various other colonists came in, all ready for the dance, in improvised fancy dress. Perhaps there was to be some amateur theatrical performance, as well as a dance. To my surprise, the guests had outfitted Robinson fancily also, with a certain amount of florid silk, wound and pinned on his head as an oriental turban. He was a handsome man, in a rather unphysical, depressed way. There he sat, trying to be proud and unobtrusive, shrinking slightly from everyone and everything, even apparently shrinking downward from the burden and ostentation of the turban. Whereupon, in came the other important resident verse writer, one named Maxwell Bodenheim, rather the worse for wear (I remember thinking), though young; with a tooth missing, and red eyes, the sight of his confrere top heavy with Asiatic shawl or table throw or sari vexed, even infuriated him. Around and around Robinson Bodenheim paced slowly two or three times, muttering, almost snarling. "You're pretty proud, aren't you? I suppose your idea is that a poet ought to put on something like that, so as to look like a poet, at least. I suppose you think it's becoming to you. Well, let me tell you, you're wrong; it isn't."

Around and around, focusing his red eyes on poor Robinson as best he could, perhaps just trying to understand him—in any case, making a bad impression.

Some people in the room pretended not to notice. A lady sitting close to the antithetical poets, perhaps one of those who had turbaned Robinson in the first place, giggled.

The turbaned one tried to say something in self-defense, point by point, two or three words at a time: "Oh, no. I don't. I didn't. Our ladies did it, just for fun."

Someone tried to take Bodenheim by the elbow and steer

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him away, and finally succeeded. It was one of those encounters of incompatibles that occur every so often in Dante's *Inferno.* Oddly enough, I wasn't afraid of Bodenheim; I understood him. He too came from Chicago, did he not? I too was (so to speak) a bohemian, though an immature and innocent one. I felt a slight fear of Robinson. If someone hadn't stopped that proto-beatnik from circling around, blearily peering and sneering, Robinson (I fancied) might finally have sprung up and strangled him.

I didn't, at that time, know anything about Robinson's melancholy life, dedicated to drink much of the time. But I saw shadows of it in his face: a play of expressions signifying that he was accustomed to hopeless, lethal embarrassments like this; he had resigned himself to the prospect of them; far too much of life was Bodenheim, Bodenheim, in one way and another. Robinson was a man of bad luck in many respects, famous but unsuccessful, which is often the fate of poets. Ultimately, one of his clever, austere verse narratives, *Tristram,* caught the public fancy; no great comfort to him, as by that time he was dying of cancer.

Bodenheim was of more rugged substance and lived on for decades in Greenwich Village, a familiar figure and a scandal. One night in a bar he and a young female companion struck up an acquaintance with an insane man, who murdered them. I wonder whether the vicious poet did not goad the homicidal lunatic, as I saw him goad Robinson that evening in Peterborough, weaving and winding his competitiveness and his pseudohumor like a spell.

I never saw either Robinson or Bodenheim again, or wanted to. But I made friends with Frost in his old age, in one way and another, without much frequentation. Although he never softened, he admitted his hardness, which made him easier to like, easier to be liked by. (This happens to have been a poignant formula of relationships in my life: I didn't like my *father* when I was a child, and was suddenly enabled to forgive him, upon my first return from Europe as a young man, when he confessed that in my childhood *he* hadn't liked *me.*)

In 1961 I went to Washington to hear Frost read his poems in the auditorium of the State Department. Afterward there was a party for him, to which I was not invited. Instead he asked me to have breakfast with him the next morning, and that was the best talk we ever had, alone in his hotel bedroom, sitting side by side,

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so that it wasn't a strain for him to hear me. His deafness, and trying not to seem deaf, sometimes caused a vagueness and alienation in his friendly relations.

He questioned me a little about the night before. "Did you see an old fellow who came up and talked to me after the reading last night? He was in awful shape; he must have had some strokes."

As it happened I had noticed him: a tall raw-boned aged creature, with a friend helping him up the aisle; mind over matter, crawling in Frost's direction, with flailing motions of his arms and legs.

"He kind of poked me," Frost went on, rather complainingly, "and he said to me, 'Frost,' he said, poking me, 'We're the same age.' I don't know what he had to say that for. It gave me an uneasy feeling."

I changed the subject, but Frost came back to it. "It's a strange thing how one man, like that one last night, will get in such awful shape, while another keeps strong and well, like me. I wonder about it; it isn't reasonable; what does it mean?"

"One thing it must mean, Robert," I answered, "is that all this barding around that you do, traveling here and there, reading poems and giving interviews, is healthy for you."

He agreed. "Yes. And I'll tell you one of the secrets of it: I never do any sightseeing. I went to Greece, you know, and I was a good classical scholar when I was young, better than Ezra Pound. The Acropolis, the Parthenon, meant more to me than any place on earth. But I just stayed sitting in the hotel; I never went up there. I knew that I could make it out better in my mind's eye than I could have seen it climbing around, squinting in the sun.

"It was the same in Jerusalem," he added. "I carried the holy places all in my head."

That was his character and grandeur: a concern about being true to himself, but more than that. All the time, all his life—though active, productive, instructive, challenging—he stayed inside his own ego, his own concept of what he was and intended to be. There might have been some psychopathology in this if he had been a man of the world, let us say, a millionaire, or a politician, or even an educator. But it cannot have been disadvantageous to him as a writer. The entire world was a unity in his pon-

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dering mind; we, his readers and listeners, were all one man. In consequence, he came to be what is called a culture hero, an American Everyman.

It was in that same year, 1961, that he addressed the National Institute of Arts and Letters about his dream of having a department of literature and the arts in the federal government, with a secretary all our own in the cabinet. He preached this and lobbied for it throughout the Kennedy administration. At that time I was president of the institute, and as such had the honor of introducing him to our membership after our dinner together. When our clapping for him ceased, he gazed around for half a minute, then made a statement that amazed me. "First, let me tell you something about Glenway; he is now one of my oldest friends. I've watched him ever since Mrs. Moody, the wife of the poet Moody, sent him to see me when he was twenty."

That meeting at the institute happened also to be my sixtieth birthday, April 11, 1961. As a general rule I haven't a strong feeling of time passing; indeed I have been afflicted with that neurosis which causes one to feel young almost all one's life; but anniversaries add something to one's arithmetic.

For a moment on that April evening great Frost disappeared from my mind, and with him all the company of the institute and the great library-dining room where we were, about fifty of us. I stood as though all soul, alone upon one of the great divides in my life. Looking back upon my visit to Peterborough as the poet's widow's envoy, I saw where forty years had gone—in the other direction, downhill. I could envisage myself older than Frost, probably dead, although an exceptional longevity runs in my family. I felt it at the roots of my hair, at the juncture of my lips on either side, and in the tips of my fingers, hot and cold: thanksgiving for one thing, having had more than I deserved always, and the tragic desire to live forever.

It was in the autumn of 1921—just after my glimpse of Robinson and Bodenheim together and my preliminary acquaintance with Frost—that I first rang Marianne Moore's doorbell at St. Luke's Place in New York, across the street from the branch library where she worked. I had no reason to do so, no recommendation from Mrs. Moody or anything of the sort, only that curiosity, favorably inclined, which is an early stage or

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phase of admiration, as also (sometimes) of love. Marianne Moore had not yet appeared in book form in this country; and I hadn't seen her attractive, small, Egoist Press publication, paper-bound, which had come out in London that year. But in the Harper Library at the University of Chicago and at the office of *Poetry* magazine, whose office boy I had been for a few months, I had copied out all of her poems that I could find in magazines. Prior to meeting the three MacDowell Colony poets, I had made acquaintance with the Middle Westerners: Vachel Lindsay, Sandburg, Masters, rather great men—but what simple creatures they all seemed, compared to the beautiful young spinster of St. Luke's Place.

I especially admired her softly blond hair, braided and put up in a crown, but not a tight crown. Her mother, Mary Warner Moore, coresided with her and was present that afternoon. I recall Mrs. Moore's intent, prophetic gaze so exactly that I still seem to shrink from it; a mysterious woman. But doubtless her scrutiny was meant to do me honor, not to intimidate me. What I remember best about the poet-daughter from that initial visit was her mentioning to me a songbird that I had to confess my unfamiliarity with. This prompted her to bring down out of a clothes closet a shoe box brimful of various wild feathers; and as she sought for the feather that was to educate me, she kept coming upon others that stirred her remembrance and inspired her brilliancy of discourse. For perhaps fifteen minutes she talked plumage, evoked the avian life, specified habit and habitats, and (it almost seemed) transposed the distant warbling and trilling into words. The room filled up with spiritual entities of the winged world, unforgettable, and to that extent immortal.

I offer you this as an image of one of the processes of poetry; of Miss Moore's poetry especially—a gathering and a preservation, a retrospect and a meditation, with her very own way of philosophizing or moralizing about things, and now and then, a sudden power of conveying, all over again, as in the present tense, old feelings of enchantment and bliss. Suddenly the feathers sing.

A part of the interest of Miss Moore's vocation and career has little or nothing to do with her art of poetry, depends only slightly if at all on how one reacts to that—it is the matter of her position in present-day American and English creative culture; her relation

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and nonrelation and antirelation to the rest, the poetical collectivity. I cannot think of anything in literary history quite like it.

Do you remember, can you see in memory, Rembrandt's so-called *The Night Watch,* which in fact is a day watch? It was left under a cover of darkened varnish for a long time, and this, added to the master's intentional chiaroscuro, misled even the art historians. About thirty upper-middle-class Amsterdam gentlemen constituting a guard of honor troop forward in most unmilitary order out of cavernous darkness into magical sunshine—all types: one almost royal looking, one haunted, perhaps by knowledge of a hopeless illness, and another corpulent and affluent; one with an angelic face, thrusting a lance all the way across the picture, as it were symbolically, and another who might be Don Quixote; a clown, a boor, a hobo, and a fanatic, and one conceivably a killer. In their midst, mystery of mysteries, a little childlike woman or womanly child, very blond, as in a dream, clad in numerous raiment of greenish gold; having, suspended from her belt, a white chicken with feet of gold; wearing also, on a ribbon, a rich purse or pouch.

Thus, to my imagination, Miss Moore had been, in the midst of her fellow writers, the literary establishment of the century. I often seem to myself deficient in humor, but when I first thought of this a while ago, I laughed aloud; and it amuses me still. If this were a lecture rather than an essay, and if I had a lantern slide of *The Night Watch* and a professorial pointer, perhaps I could attach twentieth-century literary names to all of Rembrandt's forgotten burghers: those I have mentioned, of course, depressive Robinson in the oriental headgear, the hobo Bodenheim, and Frost, that late-flowering ambitious man of the world, and Pound, Eliot, Joyce, Williams, Stevens, Cummings, Wilson, Auden—whether or not it made you laugh, you would easily perceive Miss Moore's likeness to the fairylike small personage who incomprehensibly strayed into Rembrandt's ken and captivated him while he was doing this vast commissioned work. She had that same Titian blondness; it was silvery later; nevertheless, when she was not too tired, she looked more ageless than she did as a young woman. But that is mere coincidence and superficiality. My point, worth thinking about, is that she was in the middle of the picture, a mystery in the middle of the picture—how did it happen? We know where her bodily being originated

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and had been: Carlisle, Pennsylvania, Bryn Mawr, St. Luke's Place, Brooklyn—but whence came her intellect and temperament, fantasy and genius? Who could have foreseen her?

And note that with her chief contemporaries and fellow geniuses all those years she was singularly good-natured—no problem, no struggle—but she didn't react to them very warmly. She remained detached, full of her own devices. Furthermore, both in life and career, she never seemed to march directly at us, from background to foreground, out of tradition into modernity, as ambitious happy-natured men and women in the arts are inclined to do. Like the girl in Rembrandt's picture, her movement was crossways, from left to right, breasting the mode (mode after mode), traversing the parade, a law unto herself, more exalted and more focused than the generality of literary mortals.

Now let me attempt some description of her work: the prose and the poetry relate closely, almost intermingle. Every single poem is somewhat prosaic, *as a whole;* but when she writes prose, she makes it obvious in every sentence that it is a poet writing. The difference is in detail, and is a matter of degree rather than of kind; they are more fastidiously selected and extremely compressed in verse, perhaps too extremely, with wildly leaping transitions and a sort of bejewelled mysteriousness. She shapes her strange forms, as you might say, fanatically, counting syllables, balancing the vowels and the consonants, but often this is less apparent to the ear than to the eye. She is hard to recite, even to read aloud to oneself.

Sincerity surely is one of her key characteristics. Sometimes it is indistinguishable from spontaneity. Sometimes spontaneity takes the lead, and brings about inner circumstances, feelings and convictions, in which to be sincere is the only honorable, also the only reasonable, attitude for the mind to take. Spontaneity dives; sincerity then has to swim. Statements about this occur often in her critical and explanatory prose. She speaks of "the helpless sincerity that precipitates a poem." She says that "originality is a by-product" of it and that "any writer overwhelmingly honest about pleasing himself is almost sure to please others."

All these sayings I found in one of her lectures, having to do with her "three main aids to persuasion: humility, concentration and gusto." She concludes with a strong small aphorism: "The thing is to care and to admit that you do care; *to see the vision*

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*and feel the life.*" Now I'll tell you a mystery, the kind of thing that makes literary study enthralling. A friend of Miss Moore's (and of mine) has a Xerox copy of her first typed version of this lecture, dated December 11, 1941; and it has key words handwritten in the margins, to facilitate her delivery of it to an audience, and, here and there, certain words of comment. Over the declaration just quoted—"to see the vision and feel the life"—she mysteriously wrote "Dismal!" and afterward, in *The Marianne Moore Reader,* removed that sentence, substituted another conclusion.

I may say that I prefer the removed sentence, the "dismal" sentence, to the substitute thought.

An English critic, otherwise astute, once said of this sincerity of hers that it was "so unself-conscious and ingrained as to be beautiful in itself," for its own sake. But did Miss Moore renounce or avoid self-consciousness? She reveled in it, and (I think) habitual enjoyment is a most intense form of self-knowledge. When one has delighted in something every time, year after year, awareness of it must fill one's mind to the brim, except when one is too young for habit, or unless one is mad, incapable of introspection. Surely, in Miss Moore's case, sane, nonyoung, the knowledge picked up, the experience registered and retained, the conclusion come to, intellectual indebtedness to be repaid, thanksgiving in detail—these are conscious purposes, intentions, methods. Beauty in her work is a side effect, as a rule; once in a while, it reaches a peak, a climax, and is obviously poetical—not often!

I wonder if any of you have had occasion to hear her famous conversation. When over eighty, she did not venture into social gatherings as she used to do, and a slight impediment had developed in the *sound* of her voice; but she still conversed, conversed ecstatically, whether one understood her or not. Indulging in another of my large-scale metaphors, I may tell you that I was often reminded by Miss Moore's talk of the characteristic flight of a sparrow hawk, positively flinging itself forward and upward, and shifting its slight weight from side to side; letting itself fall now and then, voluptuously, to feel the cushioning of the air under its pale bosom. When I hadn't encountered Miss Moore for some time, and I happened to see that small predator, *falco sparverius,* it prompted me to plan some sort of sociability with her before long, somewhere, somehow. If I remember rightly,

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*sparverius* is the falcon for ladies in the old manuals of hawking: I have one, residing in the spinnery behind my barn in New Jersey. As it departs helter-skelter, as my eyes bid it farewell, I wonder whether, in its native emptiness, high up, out of earshot, it gives a little laugh, as our dear conversational poetess sometimes did, one of her sentences having gone up and up until she lost track of it or control of it.

Precision was another of her delectations, another of her ways of delighting us, along with compactness and objectivity: objectivity in the sense of dedication to the object as such, to a good many categories of objects with almost impartial enthusiasm. She herself was a concentrate, all of a piece; but her world was exceedingly faceted. In this she seems the exact opposite of Frost. She may well be called conservative but never conventional, and never vague or sentimental. Can I give an instance of this fine point? Well, this, for example: *I* sometimes wish that I were an iris hybridizer; I envy the man who conceived and produced grapefruit, and the man who developed Bibb lettuce out of lesser salads. Whereas my old friend, eschewing flowers and fruit as indeed old-timey, stock-in-trade of the professional romancer, listed for us as things that she would like to have invented "the zipper fastener, epoxy glue, the collapsible dustpan," and that eight-shaped stitch with which the outer leather is drawn tight on a baseball. She seemed to live in a blissfulness of noticing things. For example, in 1962 she voyaged to Italy, and what did she notice in the Cathedral of Saint Pantaloon, one of the physician saints, in Ravillo? That all six of the lions guarding the pulpit were equally bowlegged but that each had a different face, and that their sexes were evenly matched, three and three. What in the world would she observe next?

Though all this shows a sense of humor, in a way, it went beyond sophistication and intellectual jokes, farther and farther beyond as the years passed. She had much of that gaiety that Yeats extolled in his theory of tragedy, an exalted, almost exuberant submissiveness to what is, what must be—and I refer, and she thus responded, not only to the major fatalities but to meannesses, wastes, leaks, vulgarities of our everyday life. They were a jest to her as well as a weariness unto death.

I remember that my grandmother knew an older woman in Iowa who had experienced a famous tornado in infancy. Her

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parents perished; their homestead and the contents of it were splintered by the blades of wind and dispersed, whirled away to nowhere; but she in her cradle was wafted down softly, safe! In a vitrine in a one-room museum in a county courthouse the once-wafted lady showed my grandmother a segment of oak tree with straws and other bits and pieces of wheatfield thrust into it, like pins in a pincushion. The absolute concentration of the convulsed air held the straws up tight and straight and the wind hammered them into the hardwood. Even as a child, when this was reported to me, I wondered what it could be a symbol of; surely something! When I began to try to write poetry, to comprehend what literature is, this image sprang from juvenile memory into my working mind.

And indeed, almost humorously, it is an image of young Miss Moore's appearance in our literature during World War I, when the storm of modernism in art was first breaking, and the things she cared about, quaint erudition and extreme perceptiveness and inspired imagery, began to be driven by her, as in mysterious meteorology, needle-straight into the wooden mind of the day and age.

Louise Bogan, the lyric poet and important critic, from whom, Miss Moore told me not long before she died, she learned more about verse writing than from anyone else, once inquired who her masters were during the early stages of the development of her talent. "No masters; no mystery either," she replied. "It was internal pressure.

"I like symmetry," she added. She liked—indeed revered in what I take to be a religious spirit—shapeliness in every respect: in man, in the arts of man, and in nonhuman nature. I warmly advocate her somewhat controversial word-for-word translation of La Fontaine. Once someone pointed out to me that in the first fable, "The Grasshopper and the Ant," she kept precisely to the same length as the French original, the same number of English or American words: one hundred nine. Perhaps if I had been consulted (W. H. Auden was consulted, I believe) I might have asked her for a volume of original prose, about zoos, sports, and certain eccentricities, and certain foreign travels, instead of this tour de force in verse. I like her being a fabulist in her own right, which is even more difficult than translating baroque French. Moralist and naturalist are (I think) in better balance in her na-

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ture poems—nonfictitious and, for the most part, nonnarrative—than in the work of her beloved humorous Frenchman. How carefully, how almost scientifically, she introduces and portrays each chosen bird or beast or reptile, often very exotic species, situating each in its uniqueness in the midst of general nature by means of comparison with other fauna, enriching the matter also with literary and historic references, leading along finally to us humans, in all our complexity and depth and aspirations to virtue and pretensions to immortality, swiftly moralizing, apotheosizing, epiphanizing—more anthropomorphic than anyone, and at the close of her best poems, briefer and swifter in abstract vision.

Often, for a few lines at a time, a poem of hers will seem to be describing her own poetical style. These five lines, for instance:

> . . . it is a power of
> strong enchantment. It
> is like the dove
> neck animated by
> sun; it is memory's eye. . . .

Let me now cite—that is, read, recite, in abridgement—three other perfect passages from her lifelong bestiary: two birds and one small rodent.

Her long early poem *Marriage* is about Adam and Eve as well as generalized brides and grooms. And Adam in it is

> Plagued by the nightingale
> in the new leaves,
> with its silence—
> not its silence but
> its silences. . . .

How this evokes the eternal Philomel, with not one really descriptive word; as with a wand! I can testify to the truth of it, with a recollection. Many many years ago, in the gardens behind the Hotel Mamounio in Marrakesh in Morocco, dozens of those dusky ruddy creatures, so much smaller than they sound, sang all through the night. It was their rests, not their riffs, that kept one awake—the suspense! Waiting for their small, wild themes once more, and once more, but also wanting and needing one's sleep; desiring to live entirely and to live forever, but by that very

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desire reminded of limitations—who can really transcend them? And of mortality—how can one escape it?

In "What Are Years?" there is a still more profound bird, species unspecified, with a moral at the beginning of the stanza, and religion at the end:

> . . . he who strongly feels
> behaves. The very bird,
> grown taller as he sings, steels
> his form straight up.
> Though he is captive
> his mighty singing
> says satisfaction is a low
> thing, how pure a thing
> is joy
> This is mortality,
> this is eternity.

It is the main formula of our Western mysticism: morality and eternity identical.

As poets go, as poets of the past went, Miss Moore had never been unrestrainedly poetical. It is a part of our frame of reference when we think of her as epitomizing modernness in the art. But despite restraints, I note that she had a great gift for rhapsody—more than anyone since, let us say, Rilke. She was entitled to use, and she did use, the old tempting interjection "O"—"O" capitalized, "O" without the "h"—as in the first of her poems about the jerboa:

> A small desert rat,
> and not famous, that
> lives without water, has
> happy-ness. Abroad seeking food
> or at home
> in its burrow, the Sahara field-
> mouse
> has a shining silver house
> of sand. O rest and
> joy, the boundless sand. . . .

"O rest and joy, the boundless sand." Ravishing combination of seven words, eight syllables. It is not a line but a line and a half; it is not an entire sentence; it is not the end of the poem.

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It occurs to me that I have not uttered a single adverse criticism. Here is one: It may be said that her poetry perhaps unduly lends itself to fragmentation. But who cares, when the components are strong incantations, secular prayers, sanity-saving aphorisms, new melodies of the language, puzzles that one may happily spend one's life solving, or at least pondering. Ravishment worth thinking about; upon the poor vast deserts a silvery little dwelling place for the ratlike mind of man.

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# POEMS

## David Weiss

### TRAVELER'S ADVISORY

In the sun-backed cirrus
unfurling across the lake like rice paper,
your steady hand at work,
Kai-Yu Hsu:

a robed traveler and the mountain
that towers above him,
which he will climb alone toward evening
as shadows recast and thatch his face.

I cannot make it out more clearly than that—
the traveler listens at the brook and prepares
even as his landscape goes ashen in the sky.
About his bare calves dimness like a vine winds indelibly.

A word, Kai-Yu Hsu, before you start up the slender trail:
what has happened makes you unimaginable,
no longer the man who plucks a white feather
from the wing of his largest goose

and shaves its tip carefully not to a point:
he has something difficult to shape
which averts its face in ways that,
to be true, must return its fierce

gaze to his patient fingertips.
Poised thus, he hears the traveler's
shadow glide past toward the bamboo
bridge and wants a word with him

which might unleash the simple means
to see through mist and moss and leaf
to the mountain's jagged contours.
I, too, see nothing more when I look out

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than my wish to see you as a man
scrubbing black ink from beneath his nails
when his goose hasn't quills enough
to fly or, airborne, to glide.

He holds his hands up to dry unsmudged
like two smooth sheaves on which lines
merge and cross, verge and move off
and are said to need no translation.

Kai-Yu Hsu, the fact is unimaginable:
that a mountain of mud poured through the walls
of your house to entomb you and fill your mouth.
Better this: if, in this factless night,

the traveler climbs beyond clouds
to scale the peak, he will become
its pinnacle, eroding and shadowless,
his throat enshrined by mineral quiet and moonlight.

## ALDERS

It is blue, the snow,
and colder than any name
you ever called me. *My Balalaika.*
*My Bloodless One.* A blue
which seems to seep from the earth,
from beneath your frozen eyelids.

The sun perches in the stiff, young alders,
puffs out its blond feathers against this cold
we could have breathed back to life
like that titmouse in the matchbox.
But you won't turn your face to me.

When twilight deepens, I will
go out to keep the alders from dissolving
in the dark. I'll touch each one.

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I began my life by touching you.
Soon your life began.

Now if I say, *it is blue, the snow,*
I mean there is nothing
that is not snow, nothing
that is not blue as your lips.

You had asked me to stay during your illness,
offered to pay.
No one can keep me that cheaply,
beautiful boy.

Tomorrow, they will shut you in for good.
The sun will come up anyway.
They will lower you down
inside me, a constant dusk, gentian.
There, too, will you turn your face away.

I am going out soon to walk among the alders.
All I shall feel, as always, is myself
reaching out a stiff hand, myself
filling the air around each slim sapling.

I will arch over beside them
in wind that brings fresh snow
and drag my forehead on the ground.
For you. My disfigured one. My kouros.

## Kirby Olson

### THE ROMANTIC WORLD

The topography of the world is diverse:
There are canyons, rivers and a skyscraper or two.
Once there were many volcanoes. They were romantic.

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In the oceans are some old fish reading books about tropical fish.
The oldest fish is less than fifty thousand years old.
There is a country on earth whose name is Romania.
In Romania the taste runs to opera and short romantic novels.
I believe it was a Romanian who invented the gadget
For making ice cubes, later in his life he retired
To a tributary of the Amazon, high up in the clear air
Of Peru. He was the leader of a clan who worshipped tropical fish.
There are newspapers, and every now and then an ocean liner sinks
Provoking five-inch headlines, and later, short romantic novels.
Isn't it curious, even romantic, that turtles still exist?
The pace of the world is so fast, and yet turtles still thrive.
There used to be a lot of good romantic operas written every year.
Perhaps the best one was written by Wagner and is called the Ring.
His own life could be the subject of a romantic opera as is often
The case: a composer's art mirrors his life. Also, the way a composer dies
Is often a strange summary of the way a composer lived.
Everybody on earth's life is a good subject for a romantic opera,
But it is doubtful if any more good romantic operas will be written.
Composers are no longer concerned with the romantic world.

## Rachel Hadas

### BELATED CONDOLENCE

to Richard Reid

*Quel giorno piu . . .*

Her death all over. First the funeral
you saw through trees, through clouds, across the ocean,
saw behind stars, through windows, in strange faces
eyes benign but catlike, shining pupils
fixed on an innermost intimatest target.
Pick up a page of poetry, it tells
eternally of how the studious pair
looked up from their snatched lesson

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in love's vernacular,
ambered into a paradigm forevermore.

Grief is garbage. Loss,
disorder silt the fountain at its source.
Think then of fostering transforming earth
as what she is as well as what's above her.
Dig deep for what no one but you can find.

## Alfred Corn

### from *NOTES FROM A CHILD OF PARADISE*

XXVII.

Walls of the room in the old apartment
I rented from an ancient lady cracked
And flaked, it seemed, in the very moment
With steamheat torsions of several extra
Degrees pounded through the dim labyrinth
In my skull and the racked radiators.
On the hour I clubbed myself with cognac
From the flamethrower flask looming nearby.
Mrs. Smith appeared. Rather, twin gold-rimmed
Lenses on a whitehaired crone doll untrimmed

Their fever wicks as she crept in to ask,
"Influenza? My husband died of that,
End of the War. He looked a lot like you."
The door closed on what ought to be panic
On my part; except that I am elsewhere,
Reliving what will have been happening
These last months in the blackout underground,
Knocking at peepholed doors; which would open.
I thought of you, a continent away.
Who was I? Would you tell me? I heard you say,

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Decades inside, *Now go to sleep, I'm here. . . .*
All right. And someone sputtered out beyond
The shoals of midnight, and out past the leer
Of flashing beacons—yellow, green, and red—
The shipwrecked passengers, a wailing host.
That desert island, should I call it home?
Who could decide when everything was lost?
I reached, clung to a spar, eyes meeting yours
As dawn came up. And whispered, *Still, we might—*
Then woke. The bedside lamp relit my night.

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**Elisabeth Young-Bruehl**

# THE WRITING OF BIOGRAPHY

Serious contemporary biography seems to me to be besieged at every step with a temptation comparable to the one yielded to at every step by the biographical *paparazzi* of the popular press: the temptation to try to capture the subject as the subject *really* was, to catch the subject in a moment of truth, to reveal what was hidden even from those close to the subject, even from the subject himself or herself. Here, between these covers, the biographer is tempted to say, is "the essence of a life."

The temptation to be comprehensive or definitive also comes along, of course, but it disappears under its own weight, because there are always unanswerable questions, missing pieces of information, conflicting testimonies, blank periods, and because anyone who has stopped to think at all knows that definitiveness is a myth. Similarly, the temptation to be adulatory in the nineteenth-century Lives-of-the-Great, Carlylean, hero-worship manner—the temptation to write two-volume, after-dinner testimonial speeches—slinks away of its own accord, for we live in the aftermath of a psychoanalytic revolution and know (so we think) that what meets the public eye is never the real story. But the temptation to be—what shall I call it?—a biographical essentialist both remains and takes nourishment from the psychological milieu. And it remains through years of research, through the large spaces of a book-length study. Out of all the things left behind, the papers and documents, the recollections and stories, the biographer expects the subject somehow to appear, like a voice at a séance, and to speak into the pages of the biography his or her heart of hearts.

Like most temptations in the noncriminal domain, this one ought to be faced squarely and understood *before* it is resisted. For to resist immediately, even for good theoretical reasons, a temptation that has its own good reasons for arising would be to miss a crucial ingredient in the complex process of writing a

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biography. Philosophers who pour scorn upon the project of *proving* the existence of either things or God, like lovers who ridicule the impulse to *possess* the beloved, make a comparable mistake: they rightly set aside an impossible goal, but they do not acknowledge the importance of the desire for that goal—or the complexity of the desire.

In exploring the biographer's temptation, this lure of essence, I shall note what I take to be its major forms for a biographer whose subject is a thinker and writer, and then extend my reflections to the political significance of biography as a mode of historiography.*

It seems to me that there are four—at least—forms of the temptation to capture "the essence of a life." The first stems from a kind of *esprit de système*: you want to find the ruling intellectual universal, the key question, the object of your subject's intellectual quest, and then you want to show the subject's thought and life in their integrality, in their oneness and harmony.

The second form of the temptation also arises from a need for synthesis: you select from amongst the strong traits of character and signs of habitual disposition those that either harmonize beautifully or clash intriguingly in order to present a compelling portrait of the subject's personality. You practice a version of what Virginia Woolf called "The New Biography." The goal here is vividness, life-likeness. The first form of the essentialist temptation might, if yielded to, result in a portrait of the subject recollected in tranquility; the second, in a cinema "short" or novelistic sketch of the subject doing what the subject essentially did.

The last two forms of the temptation present a whole through a part; rather than being synthetic, they are synecdochical: the subject is essentially some deed or work he or she did or made, or the subject is essentially a representative of some ideal.

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*I should note that this discussion is restricted to biographies of people who were not unworthy as people or in the eyes of their biographers. Writing about evil people, like any form of reflection on evil, deserves separate attention, because our modern tradition is conceptually so empty-handed about the whole topic.

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Pursuing the first of these forms, you select an event or series of events that seems to epitomize the subject's entire life, that seems to be the intersection where all roads in the subject's life come together and reveal their unfoldings, and you make this event or series of events stand for the whole life. This form of the temptation presents itself with special strength if your subject's life seems to have had a turning point or a crisis after which—or during which—everything changed. The goal here is drama: a play within the play or a *peripeteia* in which a destiny is, finally, manifest. In the last form of the essentialist temptation, the subject is presented as a part standing for a whole, a symbol, a rallying point—a remnant of some past, a sign of the present, or a herald for the future. You capture the subject poised like Liberty leading the people, Justice holding her scales. Biographical portraiture of this sort resembles panoramic painting.

For the sake of order and easy recall, the four forms I have sketched could take the traditional biographical subtitles: Life and Thought, A Life, The Story of a Life, Life and Times. Further elaboration and some illustrations may persuade you that these forms are not figments of my imagination or regrets after the fact of my having written a biography.

Ernst Cassirer's biography of Immanuel Kant, called *Kant's Life and Thought*, which appeared for the first time in English translation just about a year ago, is a perfect example of the first form. In his Introduction, Cassirer states his goal with admirable precision:

> . . . the peculiar fascination and the peculiar difficulty of the task . . . consist . . . in discovering and illuminating the *Lebensform*, the form of life, corresponding to [Kant's] form of thinking. . . . In Kant's actual existence . . . thought, in its objective content and in its objective 'truth', not only rules life but also receives in return the characteristic stamp of the life to which it imparts its form. Here the peculiar reciprocal relationship prevails in which each of the two moments that influence each other appears simultaneously as determining and determined.

Far from being alarmed by the motto Kant placed above his *Critique of Pure Reason—De nobis ipsis silemus* (about ourselves,

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we remain silent)—Cassirer accepted the motto as a directive for recasting as a general form all the multitude of little facts about Kant's life so lovingly recorded in earlier biographies. From the many descriptions of Kant's daily routines and affairs, he abstracted what he needed to present "a truly unified whole, not merely . . . the unity of a characteristic type of behavior." Cassirer wanted to capture Kant as he really was: "the total act of judging and reasoning" come alive.

*Kant's Life and Thought* does justice to the generality, the formality, and the systematic intent of Kant's life and thought, and it satisfies Cassirer's own neo-Kantian need for coherence and integrality. But the cost is very great: the biography lacks both historical consciousness and self-consciousness on the part of the biographer himself. The price seems to be typical for this mode of biography.

If you have never met a "truly unified spiritual whole," it is probably not because your acquaintance is limited. If it is possible at all, oneness of *Lebensform* and thought form is possible only in particular historical moments—moments when there is surface equipoise amongst conflicting forces and turmoil brewing unheeded in the depths, in the as yet unmanifest aspirations of emergent historical figures. To approach his subject clearly, Cassirer would have had to take the measure of the distance between the years prior to the French Revolution, when Kant was writing his *Critiques*, and the years of the First World War, when Cassirer was writing *Kant's Life and Thought*. And he would have had to combine his measuring with insight into his own life in the context of the First World War, into his own life as an heir of Kant, a neo-Kantian in times profoundly un-Kantian. Cassirer's reticence on both these counts was obviously important to him in philosophical terms—he, too, followed the motto *De nobis ipsis silemus*. But this attitude makes philosophy, which certainly is in one sense *philosophia perennis*, a plant without soil. In our times, anyone who writes biographically about a philosopher must take the steps that Cassirer did not take; that is, he or she must explore why it is that in our time life and thought do not cohere very often or for very long—why it is that struggles for integration are not finally successful, even though they can be waged, again and again, heroically.

Nonetheless, Cassirer's ideal is an important corrective

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upon the essentialist biographical temptation in its second manifestation, which can easily result in *Leben* without any *Form* and without any shadow of thought form. Personality portraiture, which emerged historically as *the* biographical mode of the years after the First World War, focused upon the tumultuous and inchoate wishes that were the special interest of Sigmund Freud. It is not an accident—as the Marxists say—that personality biography burgeoned in the 1920s, or that Virginia Woolf praised its founding father, Lytton Strachey, for facing his eminent Victorians as "an equal [who] preserves his freedom and his right to independent judgment." They were not always received, but lessons in the importance of independent judgment and self-development were delivered constantly by that war and its aftermath. Self-analysis was the order of the day and, as Mark Longaker observed in 1934, "the [then] present day reader most often goes to biography because he is interested in himself." Much the same remark could have been made of people who went to biography *writing*.

The precondition of personality portraiture is equality with the subject. But this equality is not a given; it is what the biography writing produces in those who do it well. For, regardless of his or her actual age, the biographer is young in relation to the subject and must begin, in one or more of the possible literal or metaphorical ways, as a child. Thus there is bound to be in the portraying an ingredient, large or small, of what Freud called the "family romance." The ingredient has, it seems, grown larger in the years between Virginia Woolf's manifesto and our own moment. It has recently become fashionable for biographers to present the "family romance" in their prefaces, by offering little analyses of their relations to the subject and the subject's place in their fantasies. The biographer's statement of personal engagement signals that what will follow is an immediate encounter, a biography that will read more like an extended interview than a history book, more like a journalist's notebook than a critical study.

The "family romance" dimension of biography writing is clearest when the biography is a work of recovery from misinterpretation or obscurity, for this kind of work combines easily with a biographer's own search for identity, a room of his or her own, freedom, and independent judgment. At the present mo-

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ment, biographies of women are particularly apt to be shaped by quests for definition—this is one of the most interesting ways in which the past now presses upon the present and shapes it. As contemporaries discover the conditions of life for their "mothers," their own sense of how the world is—and often of how it is oppressive—shifts.

More than any other historiographical mode, personality biographies, because they incorporate the "family romance," reflect relations between generations. For public figures about whom interest is constant, the period between biographies is often a generation—each generation produces a revision of the previous generation's portrait; for figures about whom interest is not so constant, a new biography often signals that two generations have parted ways or clashed with a particular urgency. Literary figures of the romantic era, of fin-de-siècle Vienna, the Weimar Republic, or the Bloomsbury Circle, have lent themselves several times recently to generational identity quests, at least in part because these figures were involved in their own generations' definitions. The legacy of romanticism weighs heavily in biographies where the focus is personality.

Biographies of this sort are predicated on the assumption that (in Leon Edel's words) "a secret myth, as well as a manifest myth [lies] hidden within every creative life." The temptation to capture a personality is phrased as a challenge to decipher a mystery, to read the palimpsest of a text right down to the Ur-text. Thus, for example, Curtis Cate says in the Preface to his *George Sand: A Biography*:

> It is clear that 'the Good Lady of Nohant' was anything but a monolithic personality and singularly complex. There is a measure of truth in the acid comment her daughter, Solange, once scribbled, after her [sic] death, on one of George Sand's letters: 'Bien malin celui qui débrouillera ma mère.' (A shrewd one it will be who will unravel my mother.) No wonder her contemporaries were so often baffled by this strange sybil with the huge, devouring black eyes who could be as mute and mysterious as the Sphinx. . . .

Cate's portrait of this complex personality is designed to display Sand as though she were a character in a novel: through episode after episode, she acquires all the attributes of a George Sand

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heroine—and she is thus tamed, prevented from devouring her biographer. Cate even makes George Sand arise again and speak in his Preface: she delivers a posthumous diatribe against present-day pornographic "lust and license." Cate can summon George Sand to his service because he is convinced that he has possessed her very essence, recapitulated her.

It is more than a little ironic that the main biographical reaction to the temptation to capture a personality—to get inside the subject's self and speak out, to possess the subject's soul authoritatively—has produced not a return to Cassirer-like synthetic vision but a heightening of the personality biography approach. The third form of the essentialist temptation, in which a part of the life stands for the whole, has converted personality portraiture into self-conscious mythologizing.

The main topic of this mode is the subject's achievement of identity; its form might be described as *Bildungsroman* plus psychoanalysis. The moment of identity achievement can come when Freud's three stages—anal, oral, genital—have all been undergone, or when Erik Erikson's seventh and last stage has been reached, or when an "existential crisis" has been met and survived, and so forth. Some form of developmental psychology provides the table of contents for the biography of turning points, the form of biography that had its great days after the Second World War—after that horrendous and prolonged crisis.

As an example of this type, I offer a passage from Jean-Paul Sartre's biography *Saint-Genêt: Comédien et martyr*:

> A voice declares publicly: 'You're a thief.' The child was ten years old.
>
> That was how it happened, in that or some other way. In all probability, there were offenses and then punishment, solemn oaths and relapses. It does not matter. The important thing is that Genet lived and has not stopped reliving this period of his life as if it had lasted only an instant.

Sartre presents the moment in which Jean Genêt became a thief, the moment in which his identity was cast as a mythic project and prepared for future mythologization. The biographer, capturing the life of his subject at an extremity, then tracks the moment to what Malraux called "*la pointe extrême de l'oeuvre*," the point in the work at which the subject is most essentially

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himself. The facts do not matter. And the goal is not to unravel a mysterious personality, it is to show one being created in vast geometries of time.

This mode adds to the mode of personality portraiture a heightened self-consciousness about the biographer's role and relation to the subject: that is, the biographer is self-consciously an artificer, a dramatist. The reader is not swept up in the rushing current of a life; rather, the reader is offered an occasion for a catharsis—for release from *mauvaise foi* and bourgeois moral monotony. The truth sought is not literal truth, for no illusion of merger between biographer and subject is allowed; the biographer is not to say omnisciently "he thought" or "she felt," but only (only!) "*This* is the important moment"—the moment when the subject's own concept of self congealed.

Both personality biography and crisis biography have been very challenging to traditionalist historians and literary critics, people who prefer chroniclers to interpreters, archivists to artificers. Writers of biographies who consider psychobiography in any form a travesty are particularly vociferous about the danger of letting the unconscious and the irrational loose upon the pages of the story of mankind. But, although many people of the "just the facts, please" schools of thought have tried to correct the excesses of personality portraiture and crisis capturing, the most forceful correctives have come from another quarter. We do not any more appreciate biographies in the mode recommended by Carlyle's *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, but we do like their modern analogues: biographies in which the subject is presented as a paradigmatic figure, a man or woman of the hour, the era, or the century—thus, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century*, Ronald Steel's careful chronicle of "the nation's greatest journalist." If the literary critical terminology of deciphering informs personality biography, and the developmental psychological terminology of stages informs crisis biography, it is the terminology of philosophies of history and science that informs the mode of Life and Times. The subject is, like a Kuhnian paradigm, a definition of the times and also a boundary at which a revolutionary new time came or will come; or the subject is, like a Marxian superstructure, "in dialectical relation" to his or her times.

In this last mode, the status of the subject is of no impor-

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tance. The subject can be a "larger than life" individual of great achievement or an unknown or even a group constituted historically or gathered by the biographer because of thematic affinities. All that is required is that the subject be or be thought typical, representative. Influenced by the *Annales* school of social history, by Marxism, by structuralism, or by any other theory that distinguishes deep trends and slowly unfolding tendencies from surface phenomena, biographers of this mode try to catch perfect synchronic moments, life moments riding on the surface like buoys over plumb lines that reach to the bottom of the sea. This perspective stands behind a reflection Peter Nettl offered in the Preface to his *Rosa Luxemburg*:

> It is often held that the importance of a biography can be measured *prima facie* by some notional consensus about the importance of the subject. Reviewers especially equate 'proper' book weight with subject status. This seems to me nonsense—or at least true only at a very crude level of judgment. Every person is interesting if interestingly presented; it is the context that matters. . . .

It is possible—I think it is likely—that the only contemporary individuals whose lives do well in the service of this last biographical mode are those who hated the idea of biography but believed that, in W.H. Auden's words:

> . . . *our* suffering, *our* weaknesses, are of no literary interest whatsoever. They are only interesting in so far as we can see them as typical of the human condition. A suffering, a weakness, which cannot be expressed as an aphorism should not be mentioned.

In other words, only the truly reticent are truly representative; all others are suitable only for propaganda.

I stated earlier that I think these four forms of temptation should be resisted. But it must be obvious by now that I do not think they should be resisted completely. In both its "perfections" and its excesses, each form has something to teach; but in order to learn, a biographer must have a sense of the limits of each.

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The Life and Thought mode easily becomes overly general and unrealistic; it stresses form to such an extent that any mere particularity of the subject—much less any foible, low cunning, or silliness—fades to insignificance. No matter what protestations to the contrary the biographer may make, thought dominates over life in this mode. The subject seems to have lived only to think. A sense of limits about this mode seems to me to arise of its own accord if the biographer simply pauses to reflect that those who think, those who truly *are* thinkers, think in order to live, in order to shape and purify their lives into lives worth living. Albert Camus made a remark in his 1942-1945 *Notebook IV* that contains a warning:

> I took ten years to win what seems to me priceless; a heart without bitterness. And as often happens, once I had gone beyond the bitterness, I incorporated it in one or two books. Thus I shall be forever judged on that bitterness which has ceased to mean anything to me. But that is just. It is the price one must pay.

Personality portraiture and crisis capturing easily become just reflections of the biographer's love or love-hate identification with the subject. A sense of limits about this mode can be learned from psychoanalysis itself: a biographer who remains a child, and who wishes to fashion the parental figures according to his or her own desires and aspirations, is bound to fail. The growing-up process of biography writing has to leave behind the stage in which character assassination is employed to make parents show their faults or lose their power to dominate. It must pass into the stage where the subject is accepted, just as a family is accepted by an adult. Marcel Proust, whose knowledge of relations between parents and children is exhausting and inexhaustible, offered the maxim for this stage: "After a certain age, the more one becomes oneself, the more obvious one's family traits become." The biographer must outgrow the wish either to *be* or to transform the subject, either to usurp the subject's place or to rebel. The biographer must be willing and able—able because possessed of an achieved self—to let the traits of the chosen "family," the subject, appear in himself or herself as naturally and inexorably as do the traits of the biological family.

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Finally, I think few people would doubt that we all *need* exemplary myths and exemplary lives—the products of biography in the last mode. We need them in our adulthood, so that we do not lose, but rather creatively transform, the project of growing up—that is, the project of reacquiring the past, the world into which we were born and in which we do our piece of the road. "Life must be lived forwards," Kierkegaard said, "but can only be understood backwards."

We need examples, yes, but the sense of limits should come with the realization that we do not need—and are even harmed by—examples completely determined by historical model making and historiographical pedagogy. We need examples who lived in the world and were very much of the world—who were neither beasts nor angels, neither antiheroes nor heroes, but humans. I think Aristotle was wrong—though, as always, for good reasons—when he set poetry and philosophy over against history, saying that the former two are concerned with universals while the latter treats only particulars. Lord Bolingbroke seems to me to have been more correct when he quoted Dionysius of Halicarnasus's saying: "History is philosophy teaching through examples." Biography is, I think, philosophy teaching through stories. But lest this seem programmatic or just dogmatic, I should confess that the life stories that please me please me because they are philosophical.

This last piece of subjectivity brings me to my own practice as a biographer. The subtitle of my biography of Hannah Arendt is not *Life and Thought, A Life, The Story of A Life,* or *Life and Times*; it is *For Love of the World.* To Hannah Arendt, the phrase *amor mundi* stood for an attitude opposite to the traditional philosophical perspective of *contemptus mundi.* To me, as I wrote about her, the phrase stood for an attitude toward her life and my readers.

It seems to me that there are two different but related questions that a biographer has to consider, before setting out upon the project of presenting to readers another person's life story. One question is philosophical, the other political.

When biographers use a phrase like "the essence of a life" (which is borrowed from Leon Edel, author of *Henry James*),

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they assume without much reflection that there is such an essence and that it is discoverable. The assumption does not have to rest on a rationalist metaphysic; it is as often tied to some form of intuitionism. But whether it is assumed that reason (or scientific intellect) finds the essence or that intuition does the job, the goal is the same: truth. A biography is supposed to be analogous to a truth statement that is adequate to, or corresponds to, "the essence of a life."

The philosophical problem involved in this assumption is a variant on the one that has been with us throughout the history of philosophy: What is truth? I certainly do not propose to offer a treatise on this question. But I believe that if one does not—as I do not—accept the assumption that there is an "essence of a life," all is not given over to relativism, anarchism, meaninglessness, or any of the other doorways upon irrationality that believers in essence fear will open if their answers to the "What is truth?" question are not embraced. In my own practice as a biographer, I did without the notion of essence by constructing for myself a schematism of types of statements I thought I could and should make. I borrowed the notion of such a schematism from Karl Jaspers and from a book I wrote about him. It should be immediately apparent that the possibility of stating "the truth" grows more and more remote toward the nether reaches of this schematism.

I first made statements of fact about events in Hannah Arendt's life and about events in the social and political contexts in which she lived. That is, I made a catalogue of events, a chronology, a chronicle, to serve as the organizing framework of my biography. The goal here *was* truth, accuracy, and completeness.

Next I made statements about Hannah Arendt's consciousness as it related to the consciousness of others who shared her world, who observed what she observed, traveled where she traveled, read the books and newspapers she read. The purpose here was to present the truth as Hannah Arendt conceived it and articulated it and shared it with others, by serving as an excerpter of quotations from correspondences, published materials, and documentary sources.

I then proceeded to make statements about Hannah Arendt's culture, that is, in the broadest sense, about the education of her spirit, her philosophical and political *Geist*. At this level of my

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narrative, I thought of myself as producing a meditation on the modalities of time—on the interplay of past, present, and future in the psychological, historical, and philosophical dimensions of one person's life. Beginning in the first chapter, and continuing through to the last, I tried to show how Hannah Arendt lived not just in our times but in time. With this meditation, I hoped to present—not describe, but present in narrative—what I take to be the fundamental chord of her philosophizing: being-in-time, the life of *homo temporalis*.

Finally, I made existential statements about the situations—Karl Jaspers would have called them *Grenzensituationen*, boundary situations—in which Hannah Arendt's life took on its characteristic forms, in which she achieved not one *Lebensform* but several. I kept in mind Karl Jasper's philosophical reflections on what it is to elucidate—not describe, but elucidate—boundary situations like the following (in his words): "that I am always in situations; that I cannot live without struggling and suffering; that I cannot avoid guilt; that I must die. . . ." On this level of my biography, I tried to develop a theme: it is not possible to *know* another's existential self, another's *Existenz*; it is possible only to show the person's forms of communication with companions. In other words, how a person makes and maintains friendships is *how*—if not *who*—she is.

The question that guided me through these levels was very simple—and very difficult: What kind of biography will build toward the last level without fixing the relations between the levels, without becoming architectonic? What kind of biography will preserve my respect for what will always remain hidden to me?

As for the political question a biographer must, it seems to me, answer, biographies are many things, many more than I have indicated in this rough survey. And in each historical era biographies have a different role to play in the private and public domains of memory. I believe the biographer's first political responsibility ought to be to think about the prevailing conditions of memory, and to write what is needed for contemporary memorialization. This may, at first, seem like a very limited point of view, but I believe it is not.

In our time, we have had to learn that it is human to remember, and that to be deprived of memory—perhaps even just

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to remember inadequately—is to be dehumanized. One might think, because we are surrounded by more means of memory than have ever been in the world—because we have libraries, "oral history" archives, films, documentary exhibits, works of art in all media, even "memory banks"—that we are protected from forgetfulness. I doubt it. Indeed, all these means seem simply to lull us into thinking that devices of memory *are* memory. But one must *learn* to remember, and thus to judge, the past.

On the other hand, the charge "lest we forget" can also be numbing. Many people fear that there have been such horrors in our time, including the horror of living under the threat of an event we call by the abstract name *the unthinkable*, that we must be commanded to remember. Otherwise, it is argued, we will perish by virtue of the past's repeating itself or of a holocaust spread across the planet more definitively than any death camp. But shelves upon shelves of answers to the command "remember!" can also lull us into thinking that voluminous information about the past constitutes memory.

Memory cannot be contrived and it cannot be commanded. We do not learn by placing ourselves in archives, and we do not learn by being required to receive information about past events. To learn one must actively participate—one cannot just receive.

A biography writer participates by preserving a life story that would, without the act of preservation, be lost, in some measure at least, with the passing of a generation. In my own case, the element of storytelling, the handing down orally from one generation to another, was crucial; for me, listening to and reproducing the stories I was told was the most challenging task of preserving a contemporary's life story. A biography reader participates by interpreting the stories reproduced. My guidance in writing came from a paragraph in Walter Benjamin's essay called "The Story-Teller."

> Every morning brings us the news of the globe, and yet we are poor in noteworthy stories. This is because no event any longer comes to us without already being shot through with explanation. In other words, by now almost nothing that happens benefits story-telling; almost everything benefits information. Actually, it is half the art of story-telling to keep the story free from explanation as one reproduces it.

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> The most extraordinary things, marvelous things, are related with the greatest accuracy, but the psychological connection of the events is not forced on the reader. It is left up to him to interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks.

As I understand it, the message for a biographer implicit here is to leave the search for the interrelations of the levels of a life story—and thus for the meaning of a life—to the reader. The best way to avoid the temptation to capture "the essence of a life" and to keep open the question of its meaning is to trust one's readers; to trust the bonds, the *rapports*, the biographer and the reader have as contemporaries. Such bonds are what Hannah Arendt called "the world."

Acts of biographical memorialization must be made from love, which is uncontrivable and uncommandable. And not from love of the subject's thought, personality, psychological uniqueness, or typicality—not from any measure of the subject's importance generally or to the biographer as an individual. Acts of biographical memorialization are for the world, from love of the world.

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**Cushing Strout**

# THE VERACIOUS IMAGINATION

For many modernist and "postmodernist" writers history is a nightmare from which they are trying to escape. This attitude contrasts sharply with George Eliot's call for stories constructed by "the veracious imagination," working out "the various steps by which a political or social change was reached, using all extant evidence and supplying deficiencies by careful analogical creation." Her terms recognize that the historical spirit and the literary imagination can be synergistic in producing a kind of analogical history. Virginia Woolf, on the other hand, spoke as a modernist when she complained that E. M. Forster's gift for observation got in the way of his poetry because "sober fact," of which good biography is made, can only be a "rest and refreshment" for a "tired imagination." This invidious distinction between history and fiction ignores their common territory. The historical element in literature is not restricted to a special genre, for as Georg Lukacs observed in *The Historical Novel*, "we cannot separate the historical novel in the narrower sense from the fortunes of the novel in general," which made it possible.

Modern historians, with their quantitative methods and analytical interest in synchrony, might seem to be far removed from the narrative novel, but some distinguished contemporary historians have affirmed their affinity with it. The southern historian C. Vann Woodward, for example, told a group of his fellow scholars in 1969 that "our kinship is actually much closer to novelists" than to social scientists, and in his presidential address to the American Historical Association in 1981, the colonial historian Bernard Bailyn warned historians that they were in danger of forgetting that narrative organization is essential to any act of synthesis that would capture the drama of social change. A dozen years earlier J. B. Hexter, professor of English history, had challenged positivistic philosophers and historians by arguing that writing histories necessarily entails the use of rhetorical techniques as essential elements in making character, place, and milieu intelligible. Narrative is not the only method of either the historian or the novelist, but both are committed to finding truth in

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temporal processes by taking account of the possible, the probable, and the actual. Aristotle has been influential in regarding the truth of art as closer to philosophy than to history, but he conceded that sometimes (as in Greek drama) the artistic sphere of the possible is devoted to actual persons and events.

George Eliot's "veracious imagination," as a warning against anachronism, also has pertinence to contemporary dramatists of historical issues about Oppenheimer, Salem witchcraft, Burr, Buchanan, or the Rosenbergs. Her concept opposes, however, what I would call the "voracious imagination," which dominates much fashionable contemporary literature and critical theory. The voracious imagination exhibits the tendency to see everything as a text produced by projection of the mind on an environment subject to limitless transformation into whatever fables we can construct. This voracity betrays itself in the "new journalism" of the 1960s, which advertised itself as a new genre—the "nonfiction novel." Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* was the forerunner. This pseudo-invention of a genre merely signaled that Capote wished to exercise a poetic license denied to reporters; while at the same time avoiding any moral evaluation or explanation of the murderers who massacred an innocent American family. Mark Twain in *Life on the Mississippi,* Henry Adams in *The Education of Henry Adams,* and James Agee in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* for example, show that Capote did not invent a new genre, though his predecessors have the merit of combining their dramatizing talents with a personal responsibility for moral interpretation. In this respect, Norman Mailer in *The Armies of the Night* is closer to them than to Capote, and he is especially close to Henry Adams, whose personal background could hardly be more different. Mailer wonders whether his account of the 1967 march on the Pentagon is really a "novel" or a "history." At first he thinks the more personal part of it is novelistic, the more public part, historical; but he later concludes that since he was a witness of his personal participation in the first book, it is history; while the second book, since he was dependent on secondhand testimony for the concluding phase of "the battle for the Pentagon," is not history, but the "condensation of a collective novel." Yet neither "novel" nor "history," nor hybrid of both, is really an appropriate term for this genre—the confessional memoir, as old as St. Augustine or Rousseau. Closer to home, it

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imitates *The Education of Henry Adams* in its ironic third person narration and its combination of self-ironizing autobiography with idiosyncratic philosophizing about history. Both men participate in the long American tradition of what Sacvan Bercovitch has called the "jeremiad"—a Puritan sermon addressed to a present crisis of "declension" in public morality that prophesizes an imminent millennial future through the moral dedication of true believers. Mailer ends by evoking Lincoln's rhetoric and saluting the civilly disobedient Quakers as America's redeemers.

In 1980, six books on the bestseller list of the *New York Times* obscured the old distinctions between fiction and nonfiction. What is alarming in this trend is the danger of corruption in a facile blurring of boundaries. Alex Haley's *Roots* has been a hugely popular success as a book and even more as a television show, but how much of it is literary plagiarism, legitimate novelizing, or reliable reporting is moot. Creators of such hybrids take it for granted that we will not press them hard to be candid about where they have fictionalized. There is fun and no harm in this, of course, when it is merely a matter, for instance, of having Sigmund Freud meet Sherlock Holmes, who has by now also fictionally met Dracula, Dr. Jekyll, Jack the Ripper, and even President Theodore Roosevelt, in various detective stories. But in journalism hybrids are corruptible into lying, as in the recent revoked award of a Pulitzer Prize for journalism to a reporter whose story turned out to be fiction.

Voracity of another sort characterizes much fashionable, serious, contemporary fiction. A French critic has celebrated American "postmodern metafiction" because its "schizoid structure" and "hallucinated subjectivity" tend to "the subversion and the destruction of the narrative form itself." In short, American novelists like John Barth and Thomas Pynchon sound to him like French structuralists and deconstructionists. Praising Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* for its author's ambiguous and agnostic attitude about the truth of the questions his narrative generates, one critic calls on R. G. Collingwood's critical idealism, with its emphasis on the historical imagination, as a philosophical basis for uncertainty. Yet Collingwood himself always knew that the historian's "business is not to invent anything, it is to discover something." He even believed that a historian could make an argument that "left nothing to caprice and admitted of

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no alternative conclusion, but proved its point as conclusively as a demonstration in mathematics." Nothing could be further from the spirit of the current fictionalizers of history, or the literary critics for whom everything is a fictive text, as if either texts or fiction could be defined in the absence of something from which to distinguish them. Certainly the spheres of history, fiction, and biography do overlap as narrative forms. But an overlapping is not the same thing as the swallowing up of one category by another. This night of the voracious imagination is not the one in which all cats are gray, but rather the one in which they are as brightly painted as Henri Rousseau's animals. Or to vary the metaphor, the hungry lion of the imagination is made to lie down with the lamb of humble fact by giving the lion every day a fresh lamb to devour.

What happens in this case is demonstrated by E. L. Doctorow's *Ragtime* and Robert Coover's *The Public Burning*. Both novels display a remarkable novelistic cleverness, but their desire to surprise and stun is also greedy. It is ominously similar to what Samuel Johnson called "that hunger of imagination which preys incessantly upon life," symbolized for him by the vain impulse behind the building of the Great Pyramid in Egypt. Doctorow's *Ragtime* seems to be a historical novel, at first, but its narrative power derives from an anachronism, a black protestor from the 1960s, who is thrust into the era of the early 1900s, where his militancy was historically impossible. Moreover, this character is himself derived from Kleist's Michael Kohlhauss, with the change of his horse to a car and the only clue to its German source being the change of his name to an English spelling, "Coalhouse." Coover carries the cleverness of voracious imagination even further in his hyperbolic and scatalogical parody of the Rosenberg case. Richard Nixon is his central character, who unbelievably becomes infatuated with Ethel Rosenberg and is finally brutally sodomized by a folklore figure of Uncle Sam in Times Square, as the Supreme Court slips on elephant droppings. "What if we broke all the rules, played games with the evidence, manipulated language itself, made History a partisan ally?" this narrator asks. The fictional Nixon thus makes his parallel with the actual Nixon in his treatment of the Watergate issues. But Coover's literary use of this same premise only contributes further to a cavalier disdain for historical actuality, probability, or even plausibility. Ironically,

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Doctorow's *Ragtime* paved the way for Coover, whose parodic history contrasts sharply with Doctorow's own revisionary, but profoundly historical, dramatization of the Rosenberg case in *The Book of Daniel.*

The basis for my criticism of historical fiction was beautifully formulated by Benedetto Croce in *La storia come pensiero e come azione*: "Poetry and history are, then, the two wings of the same breathing creature, the two linked moments of the knowing mind." From this point of view the novelist and the historian are both engaged in knowing. I also take as a standard one of Bertolt Brecht's warnings against any modern attempt to "annihilate distance, fill in the gap, gloss over the differences" between old plays and new, instead of taking a "delight in comparisons, in distance, in dissimilarity—which is at the same time a delight in what is close and proper to ourselves." Brecht did not take his own advice, however, in his play about Galileo, nor did Heinar Kipphardt follow it in his play about J. Robert Oppenheimer, who functions in the drama as Brecht's Galileo in modern dress. Kipphardt invents a final monologue for Oppenheimer in which he condemns himself as a betrayer of the international spirit of science, while urging scientists to work no longer for purposes of national defense. The actual Oppenheimer, after his prejudiced hearing in 1954 had come to its unfair and unintelligent conclusions, spoke in very different terms about scientific advisers: "I know that they will work faithfully to preserve and strengthen this country. I hope that the fruit of their work will be used with humanity, with wisdom and with courage. I know that their counsel when sought will be given honestly and freely. I hope that it will be heard." For Kipphardt he was only a ventriloquist's dummy used to pass judgments on all those scientists who have worked on war projects, while the documentary form of the play encouraged the audience to think that the author's own point of view was actually mirrored in the thousand pages of testimony. Oppenheimer legitimately attracted a dramatist's attention, because there were certainly tragic elements of *hubris* in his distinguished career, but Kipphardt's hero, who condemns himself for subservience to the demands of the Defense Department, is more like Brecht's self-condemning Galileo than either character is like his historical counterpart.

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Arthur Miller's historical play, *The Crucible*, widely performed in Europe as well as America, may illustrate the problem of analogical history: Can the dramatist speak about both the 1690s and the 1950s, at the same time, interpreting both a Puritan witchcraft panic and a demagogic anticommunism as the same phenomenon? Or will he inevitably beg too many questions about specific events, or rise to an abstract level of fatal vagueness? At one level, Miller's witch-hunt analogy works very well in showing the social paranoia at work in both the 1690s and the 1950s, because witches for New England Puritans were, indeed, traitors who had dedicated themselves to subverting the community. (The Puritan legal standard for convicting witches—the testimony of two witnesses to overt actions—was even remarkably similar to the one later enshrined in the treason clause of the U.S. Constitution.) Moreover, Miller rightly emphasizes that repression, confession, and repentance were linked together in both periods. Miller's view of the accused and the accusers representing competing factions in Salem's social and economic life is also true to the best and most recent study (*Salem Possessed*) by two historians (Boyer and Nissenbaum) of the witchcraft panic. His hero John Proctor was, in fact, a representative victim, according to the historians, because he was a prosperous farmer and tavern keeper, whose rising status was likely to affront those provincials who feared that success under mercantile capitalism was likely to be a sure sign of that restless discontent which supposedly seduced Puritans into being witches.

The difficulty with Miller's analogy is that he projected two features of his present world into the Puritan village. While there is no credence given to witchcraft demonism in his play, he presents Puritan political authority as if *it* were demonic. One would never know from his account that the clergy criticized the court for its dependence on specious "spectral evidence" or that Governor Phips put a stop to the trials and issued a general pardon. But the more subtle problem is that Miller was most indignant about a small minority of those called before congressional committees, the artists who informed on the political radicalism of their former associates. When he appeared before such a committee, after he had written his play, he honorably refused to name the names of others. His indignation is understandable because investigators had disregarded the First Amendment to the

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Constitution as a shield for free speech and freedom of association. Even so, the refusal of many witnesses to tell the truth about their former political associates is different from the refusal of twenty accused witches to save their lives by making a false confession of their guilt. Refusing to inform and refusing to lie are different virtues, and the accused Puritans suffered a much greater ordeal than Miller's accused contemporaries, who did not have to pay with their lives, even though they sometimes lost their jobs.

Miller's Proctor is a good Puritan, nevertheless, in his concern for his good name, his sense of guilt in sexually betraying his wife, and in his final refusal to falsify his experience with lies in order to save his life. History's Proctor was also heroic, being one of those whose exemplary conduct from the jail to Gallows Hill and on the gallows itself was said to be "very affecting and melting to the hearts of some considerable spectators." But we never glimpse him on the gallows in the play. If we did, Miller would be hard pressed to square his Proctor with the actual man. The Proctor of history was brave enough to charge the authorities with such "Popish cruelties" as torturing his son, but he was also portrayed by a contemporary skeptic of the panic as one of those who were remarkably forgiving of his enemies: "They spoke without reflection on Jury and Judges, for bringing them in guilty, and condemning them: they prayed earnestly for pardon for all other sins, and for an interest in the precious blood of our dear Redeemer. . . ." If Miller had responded to this tie between victim and executioner, he would not have been denied modern parallels. His play would then, however, have suggested analogies with more weighty trials, having more complex dynamics than the congressional hearing at which he appeared. The identification of accused persons with the ideology of their judges is what Arthur Koestler saw as the most dramatic feature of the Moscow trials, and one could make a similar point about Galileo's Catholicism or Oppenheimer's commitment to using the A-bomb. Miller's imagination was not subtle enough to grasp this aspect of historical reality.

Can historical fiction ever transcend the difficulty of risking falsification by introducing some actual persons into narratives that are, in part, invented? Georg Lukacs has usefully dealt with this objection by observing that the historical novelist can

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avoid colliding with the historical sense of veracity by focusing on the milieu, rather than on specific actual events, and keeping actual figures in minor roles, relating to unfamiliar episodes in their careers. But there are bolder strategies as well. Robert Penn Warren's *All The King's Men* deals with a character, Willie Stark, who is closely analogical to the actual Huey Long, dictator-reformer of Louisiana in the early 1930s. Warren views him, however, through the eyes of a fictional narrator whose own ideas about the politician's story become more important than the story itself. Warren has emphasized his use of "the myth of 'Huey,'" rather than the actual man. But in the trajectory of their careers, the sources of their power, and the discordant elements in their characters, the two men mirror each other, whether described by biographer or novelist. Warren's novel is most interested in ideas about the reciprocal relation between past and present and between idea and fact, about the role of the hero in history, and about the linkage of the sense of responsibility with an acceptance of guilt. If Warren took "the myth of 'Huey'" to Perugia, where he wrote his story, he also took an older, Christian myth of the fall of man, hinted at in his title. But to minimize the historical nature of this novel is to suffer from the division between fact and idea that the novel philosophically rejects.

For some of our recent novelists the point of turning to an actual historical moment and an actual protagonist is to revise the conventional historical wisdom about those who are neglected, shadowy, or obscured under a cloud of political obloquy. William Styron, Gore Vidal, E.L. Doctorow, and John Updike are recent examples of American writers who have tried to rescue from obscurity actual historical persons, whose place in the history books has previously never been large or creditable. At the same time, their choice of topic speaks to the political condition of their present readers. These writers all face the danger of leading us into the border country where history and fiction overlap without any compass or map for our orientation. Let us look at the strategies they use for exploring this territory without getting the reader lost.

Styron, Vidal, and Doctorow all deal with persons tried for sedition (Nat Turner, Aaron Burr, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg), and their narrative tactic is to create imaginary memoirs, based

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on a knowledge of actual documents and their own speculations. Styron's dramatization of Turner's slave rebellion in early nineteenth-century Virginia, *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (1967), stirred up a storm of controversy, especially among black radical separatists who had their own politicized image of Turner as a precursor of Malcolm X. Styron's Turner was conditioned by the author's southern sense of needing to come to terms with the Negro personality, after generations of legalized racial segregation had hidden his real features from whites. Styron was also impressed by Erik Erikson's psychoanalytic portrait of young Martin Luther's "identity crisis" as a religious rebel. Styron narrates the evolution of a revolutionary preacher by showing how his religious and ambiguous sexual feelings were exacerbated by patronizing whites, who aroused and frustrated a sense of his own equal worth, despite his status as a slave. Styron's imagination seized upon one provocative fact in the existing document of Turner's confession made to a white lawyer: the only person Turner actually killed was an adolescent white girl.

Styron's psychologizing interprets Turner's apocalyptic Old Testament God as a surrogate for his kind owner, whose inability to carry out his promise to free Nat disenchants the slave with his "disgraced and down falled prince." The girl, who encourages his Bible-reading and unconsciously solicits his sexual interest, provokes both his tenderness and his rage. This invention of Styron's contrasts with a newspaper reference to Turner's having a wife on another plantation, and radical blacks were deeply offended because in their own image Turner was sexually mature, happily married, and entirely without the hesitations and distaste for violence that Styron attributed to him. Now it is true that the old-fashioned southern plantation novel had often been fond of seeing Hamlet in its white heroes, as Styron was fond of seeing Hamlet's "access of guilt" and "fatal irresolution" in Turner. There is no evidence, furthermore, that the actual Turner was a Hamlet, or that he lusted after the girl he killed. But Styron had no obligation as a novelist to present a Turner politically favorable to the ideology of black nationalists. His Turner is only a historically *possible* Turner, not even a probable one, but he is, at least, a more human and complex figure than the crazed, fiendish fanatic pictured by the lawyer's document of his confession. In any event, there have been several

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different Turners in the black writings about him, for the actual Turner never spoke firsthand to us. What black oral tradition has kept alive is only the image of a messianic and visionary preacher, who brought down the wrath of a just God and of oppressed blacks upon slave-owners. And this figure also lives in the novel.

The political dispute over the novel has obscured the extent to which the story is actually cast as a sustained meditation by Turner on his estrangement from God, an alienation healed at last before his execution by his memory that the girl he has killed has indirectly taught him the meaning of a biblical passage: "God is love." Though he feels remorse for her death, he never regrets the deeds of the rebels themselves. Unfortunately, Styron undermined his ground in an interview by arguing that the Hamlet-like traits he gave to Turner "must have been true in history" and must "historically" have "helped undermine the rebellion." Styron later replied to his critics in different terms by asserting that no single fact could be sacred for him because the novelist provides "an imaginative truth which transcends, in this case, what the historian can give you." Ironically, the weakness of Styron's portrait of slavery is that he relied too much on historians, who had not yet learned the lesson taught by the black novelist Ralph Ellison: that American slaves were more than creatures of white men, and had "helped create themselves out of what they found around them" and "made a life upon the horns of the white man's dilemma." Styron need not have created a Turner black radicals would recognize, but his own Turner sometimes suggested the expatriated, bisexual James Baldwin, a writer whom Styron knew personally, better than he did a nineteenth-century slave.

While Styron was savaged by those who had a political investment in Turner, Gore Vidal's *Burr* was a very popular book in America, even though it ridiculed George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, the revered leaders of the American Revolution, and celebrated Aaron Burr, who was tried for treason. Some of its appeal probably had to do with its gossipy suppositions that the fictional narrator was Aaron Burr's unacknowledged natural son and that Alexander Hamilton's offense in provoking Burr to a duel was the accusation that Burr had been the lover of his own daughter. Burr's cynical tone about those in power was

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also popular, however, because in 1973, when the novel appeared, newspapers were filled with stories about "low men in high places," just the sort of vision the novel projects of our early republic. Vidal's narrative animus is legitimate because, although it cuts Washington, Jefferson, and Hamilton down to a much smaller size than even realistic historians would recognize, the belittling views are presented through the eyes of Burr, not Vidal. Vidal had room for his own interpretations in the obscurity of Burr's ultimate purposes; even so, the novelist's vivid, witty portrait of his hero actually coincides very closely with Nathan Schachner's earlier, more sober biography of "a man of extraordinary talents, approaching genius, of a man of human mold and human faults, of one who remained to the end erect against the gods," despite his reputation as a disloyal intriguer tried for treason.

While the historian never complains of having too much documentation, the novelist may. In a remarkable eighty-page commentary on his closet drama, *Buchanan Dying*, John Updike highlighted the novelist's need to find a way into his subject that is not blocked by historians' findings. Updike felt the burden of his own historical knowledge that "an actual man, Buchanan, had done this and this, exactly so, once: and no other way. There was no air." He needed "a palpable medium of the half-remembered in which to swim," and his imagination was "frozen by the theoretical discoverability of *everything*." Once he flew to President James Buchanan's home and, looking in the window, "solitary as a burglar, as a lover," felt that coming closer had only put him farther away. Struggling with his play, he broke his leg, turned forty, and buried his father, experiences that may have helped him to feel an emotional link with Buchanan's agonized wrestlings with the intractable problem of slavery. Updike's solution was to find an opening for his imagination in the ambiguity surrounding the girl who broke her engagement to Buchanan and soon died under mysterious circumstances, perhaps a suicide, believing he no longer loved her. Updike ingeniously links this private story to the public one about the crisis over slavery. He sets up a resonance between Buchanan's personal and political failures, matching his rejection by his fiancée with his rejection by the South Carolina secessionists. Updike also found his scope for the dramatist's imag-

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ination by focusing the play around a dying man's reveries and deliriums, rather than his actions. The dramatist's sympathetic portrait of a president conventionally dismissed as weak and ineffective reflects a shrewd judgment that Buchanan's delaying tactics helped to give "defensive coloring to the dubious cause of putting down secession with force." This point is reinforced, in the most searching recent historical study of the origins of the Civil War, by David M. Potter's conclusion that Buchanan had "a justifiable fear" of "delivering a fatal blow to compromise at a time when, on both fronts, there appeared to be some grounds for renewed hope." Updike's scrupulosity about historical knowledge and his strong artistic imagination created a conflict he could reconcile only by moving to another medium in order to find room for his own freedom of invention.

E.L. Doctorow in *The Book of Daniel*, on the other hand, found a novelist's solution easier because of the uncertainties surrounding the Rosenberg case, which he looked at sidelong, as it were, from the point of view of the eldest child, whose parents were executed as atomic spies. His fictional Daniel, doing his graduate thesis on radicalism, is a chip off the block of his father, "who always gave you more of an explanation than you bargained for," and the novel's narrator, oscillating from first to third person narration, as if struggling for objectivity, seeks to find the truth about his parents' role in the events that led to their execution. Daniel eventually develops his own plausible hypothesis about the case, but Doctorow wisely presents it as being unprovable even within the story. What is remarkable about the novel from the standpoint of the veracious imagination is how historical its major suppositions have turned out to be. The Rosenberg children have recently surfaced in the post-Watergate era in the hope of clearing their parents' name. Their book, *We Are Your Sons*, reveals the different temper of two radicals whose perspectives are matched with eerie exactness in the novel itself. In both novel and reality the older child, like his father, is more committed to rationalism, to theory, to the Old Left, and to nonviolent demonstrations, while the younger is more inclined towards the counter-culture, towards drugs, towards communes, and towards more disruptive demonstrations. "It was not an easy transition from Old Left to New Left," Michael Meerepol told an interviewer; and Robert, the younger, declared in a memoir:

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"I was more of a hippie. Also politics for him seemed to be an intellectual, letter-writing, party-building affair, for me a series of confrontations." This difference is dramatized in the novel by Danny's uneasiness at the march on the Pentagon in 1967 and by his sister Susan's involvement with a counter-culture radical much like Abbie Hoffman. The change of his sibling's sex is to justify the biblical allusion to Susanna, who risked her life to preserve her incorruptibility, just as the novel's Susan saw all compromise, moral and political, as complicity and was forced to realize that her parents were seen by New Left radicals as being complicit with the system for relying in court on the Fifth Amendment's protection against self-incrimination.

In the 1950s two literary critics, Leslie Fiedler and Robert Warshow, complained that the Rosenbergs were "crass and hypocritical" in calling on their Jewish faith to arouse sympathy for themselves, in hiding their political commitments behind the Fifth Amendment, and in expressing no thoughts or feelings except those demanded by propaganda about their political role. Doctorow explicitly counters this criticism by providing human explanations for the behavior of his Isaacson family. He takes seriously the idea that "the perfectionist dream of heaven on earth" can be a substitute religion for those who otherwise have given up their Jewish heritage, and he shows how this Jewish yearning entered into three generations of Isaacsons. The Communism of the parents, formed during the Popular Front, is presented as an illusory form of an ancient and thwarted Jewish impulse of "looking for paradise on earth," and the story exhibits the changing forms of this passion in the delirious memories of the immigrant grandmother, the Communist idealism of the ordinary parents, poor in wealth and self-esteem, and the anguished attempts of the victimized children to carry on the family tradition by their own troubled connections with New Left politics in the 1960s.

Doctorow casts a brilliant shaft of light on two features of the public record. Ethel Rosenberg was arrested a month after her husband was, and official investigators were never convinced of her guilt; instead they hoped to use her to make her husband talk about others. The second oddity is that Julius Rosenberg in his prison letters persistently retains a confidence that American law and public opinion will exonerate him, while his wife takes

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a more implacable and realistic position. The novel illuminates these facts by its protagonist's hypothesis about what really happened. Danny Isaacson eventually comes to believe that his father and the man who apparently pointed a finger at him during the trial were actually conspiring together not as spies, but as Communist comrades who were protecting the actual spies, who fled the country. Daniel's mother only discovers this hidden reality at the trial and is appalled at the gamble her husband has taken with their lives out of his patriotic confidence in the American legal system. Doctorow presents Paul Isaacson as a man who has deeply internalized the sentimental Popular Front ideology, which celebrated Jefferson, Paine, and Lincoln, while calling Communism "twentieth-century Americanism." Moreover, Doctorow's hypothesis responds as well to the actual fact that Mrs. Sobell, one of the Rosenberg defenders at a fundraising rally, proclaimed that "Julie and Ethel could save their own skins by talking, but they will never betray their friends." When someone pointed out that her remark hardly squared with the premise of their total innocence, she fainted. In fact, the arrest of the Rosenbergs did alert others to flee, and one such couple was arrested in England in a house as overloaded with espionage equipment, according to Rebecca West, as the ark was with animals.

Doctorow's story illuminates the historical case by transcending the sterile opposition between those who accept the politically given terms "guilty" and "innocent," as if the cold war rhetoric of the government or Communist propaganda about witch-hunts were the only genuine alternatives. His narrative reformulation of the issues not only prevents the novel from collapsing into sentimental melodrama; it also can prevent historical discourse from suffering the same fate.

I have argued not for seeing history as fiction, but for seeing some fiction as analogical history in contrast to those novelists who disdain narrative except as a technique to be subverted in a narcissistic calling of attention to the artifices of artistic cleverness. While I salute documentary drama, historical novel, and imaginative journalism for moving into the dangerous border country where fiction and history overlap, I am also anxious to put critics on guard against the popularity of those who underestimate the hazards of travel in such border country, or who

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sponsor theories about "nonfiction novels" or "metahistories" in which either fact or fiction as a category is blown up so far as to swallow the other voraciously with nothing left over.

Though Aristotle's distinction between poetry and history is too rigid, it can usefully suggest that the historian's truth will always have to be more literal than the artist's, just as the artist's is bound to be more figurative than the historian's, because the historian is always constrained by public evidence, while the artist, even in a historical novel, has some vital freedom to invent and to transform. Written history itself, of course, is never merely *"wie es eigentlich gewesen,"*—what actually happened, as event alone, the phrase our nineteenth-century positivists used to borrow out of context from Ranke. Because actions have purposes and meanings, historical events are necessarily imagined as elements of a human story, which did not exist in just that form before. Historians and novelists are necessarily allies because, for both, narrating involves the art of evoking persons and places as well as the making of explanations that render intelligible the actions constituting the drama.

Today, in some quarters, the voracious imagination severs literature from history and resolves history into rhetoric. Its antidote is the veracious imagination, which travels in that border country where history and fiction overlap, while preserving as well a vital tension. Narration, says the Spanish philosopher Ortega, "implies that the narrated events are essentially clear and not problematic." Nothing in modern fiction or historiography, however, warrants this assertion. These disciplines can express their truths only in *complex* narratives. *To narrate* comes from *narrare,* whose Latin stem means *knowing. To tell* is also, in English, *to relate,* which means *to connect.* In his novel *Howard's End* E. M. Forster once urged upon us a moral: "Only connect the prose and the passion of life." It is a link that the best novels and histories always forge for their readers. He thought it was a very difficult one to make, and so it is as well for the linkage of history and fiction. Yet both historian and artist can converge because they can share an attitude expressed by our philosopher, William James: "I am finite once and for all, and all the categories of my sympathy are knit up with the finite world *as such,* and with things that have a history. . . . I have neither eyes nor

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ears not heart nor mind for anything of an opposite description, and the stagnant felicity of the absolute's own perfection moves me as little as I move it." So long as this Jamesian belief lives, artists and historians can move together into a border country where their territories partially overlap and share some common obligations.

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**Sandra M. Gilbert**

# RIDER HAGGARD'S HEART OF DARKNESS

More than fifty years ago, Mario Praz wrote about the nineteenth century that "In no other literary period . . . has sex been so obviously the mainspring of works of imagination." In his groundbreaking study of *The Romantic Agony*, however, Praz amassed evidence to demonstrate, almost overwhelmingly, that as the century wore on it was not just "sex" but specifically the female sex, and even more specifically the power of the female sex that increasingly obsessed male writers in France and England. It should not be surprising, then, that one of the major bestsellers of the period was a novel whose terse title was an unadorned female pronoun, suggesting that the book might be an abstract treatise on the female gender or a fictive exploration of the nature of womanhood. Published in 1887, Rider Haggard's *She* sold a nearly record-breaking thirty thousand copies within a few months, and most of its charisma seems to have come from the regal radiance of its heroine.

The formal title of this woman (whose "real" name was Ayesha)—She-Who-Must-Be-Obeyed—was hardly less shocking than the title of the novel in which She starred, yet it was as crucial to the book's power as it was in representing Her power. For Haggard's heroine was in many ways a definitive fin-de-siècle embodiment of fantasies that preoccupied countless male writers who had come of age during a literary period in which, to go back to Praz's remark, the (female) sex had been "obviously the mainspring of works of imagination." Unlike the women earlier Victorian writers had idealized or excoriated, she was neither an angel nor a monster. Rather, She was an odd but significant blend of the two types—an angelically chaste woman with monstrous powers, a monstrously passionate woman with angelic charms. Just as significantly, however, She was in certain impor-

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tant ways an entirely New Woman: the all-knowing, all-powerful ruler of a matriarchal society.

It is especially because of this last point that Haggard's portrait of Her was so popular (and so popular with male readers in particular). In addition, Her story was both a summary and a paradigm of the story told in a number of similar contemporary tales, all of which were to varying degrees just the kinds of fictive explorations of female power that Haggard's title promised and his novel delivered, and many of which solved what their authors implicitly defined as the *problem* of female power through denouements analogous to—perhaps even drawn from—the one that Haggard devised for *She*. Both the fascination of Haggard's semidivine New Woman and the compulsiveness with which he and his contemporaries made her "the mainspring of works of imagination" were symptoms of a complex of late Victorian sociocultural and sexual anxieties that have until recently been overlooked or even ignored by critics and historians alike.

At first, of course, as Haggard's hero Leo Vincy, his aggressively misogynistic guardian Horace Holly, and their servant Job begin their journey toward Herland, they may not seem to be adventuring into a realm whose strangeness rests primarily in its femaleness. The African coast on which they are shipwrecked, for instance, seems a standard adventure story setting, complete with wild beasts, fever-inducing mists, and mysterious ruins. As they travel inland, however, through vaporous marshes and stagnant canals, the landscape across which they journey seems increasingly like a Freudianly female *paysage moralisé*. When they are finally captured by a band of fierce natives whose leader is a biblical-looking Arab called "Father," our suspicions are confirmed. Lifted into litters, the explorers yield to a "pleasant swaying motion" and, in a symbolic return to the womb, they are carried up ancient swampy birth canals into "a vast cup of earth" that is ruled by She-Who-Must-Be-Obeyed and inhabited by a people called "the Amahaggar." About her people they soon learn that

> in direct opposition to the habits of almost every other savage race in the world, women among the Amahaggar live upon conditions of perfect equality with the men, and are not held to them by any binding ties. Descent is traced only

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> through the line of the mother, and . . . they never pay attention to, or even acknowledge, any man as their father, even when their male parentage is perfectly well known.

Given the brief appearance of Leo's ancestor, Callicrates, in Herodotus's history of the Persian Wars, it is notable that there is an eerie correspondence between the strange land of the Amahaggar and the perverse Egypt Herodotus describes as a country whose people

> in most of their manners and customs, exactly reverse the common practice of mankind. The women attend the markets and trade, while the men sit at home at the loom; . . . women stand up to urinate, men sit down.

In each case the country is described as uniquely alien, and alien in particular because relations between its men and women inhabitants are exactly antithetical to those that prevail in "normal" civilized societies. Thus both Egypt and Kôr, as Haggard's explorers learn the Amahaggar land is called, are realms where what patriarchal culture defines as misrule has become rule.

She, Herself, however, manifests the severity of Her misrule only after some delay. At first, it is Her subjects who enact and express the murderous female sexuality that She herself tends to deny. Thus we learn before meeting Her what it means for Her to be the queen of a people who, bizarrely, "place pots upon the heads of strangers," for shortly after the explorers arrive in Kôr they are invited to a feast at which a group of the Amahaggar try to kill the Englishmen's Arab guide, Mahomed, by putting a red hot earthen pot on his head. This astonishing mode of execution, a cross between cooking and decapitation, which seems to have had no real anthropological precedent, is such a vivid enactment of both castration fears and birth anxieties that it is hardly necessary to rehearse all its psychosymbolic overtones.

She is absolutely identical with the Byronic femme fatale who haunted nineteenth-century writers from Keats and Swinburne to Pater, Wilde, and Macdonald—so much so that Her character in a sense summarizes and intensifies all the key female traits these artists brooded on. Having lived under the hill of ordinary reality since classical antiquity, She chats familiarly about Greek and Arab philosophers with the bemused Holly;

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clearly, like Pater's Gioconda, She has "learned the secrets of the grave." Wherever She studied, moreover, She has strange herbal wisdom, esoteric healing powers, and arcane alchemical knowledge. She condemns men casually to death by torture and is capable of "blasting" those She dislikes with a Medusan glance.

She is not merely a destroyer; because She is a combination of Persephone and Venus, She is a destroyer *and* a preserver. Perhaps the most peculiar feature of Haggard's discussion of Her kingdom is his ruminative, obsessive, even at times necrophiliac interest in the mummies that surround Her as well as the embalming techniques through which they have been preserved. The Englishmen are shown a "pit about the size of the space beneath the dome of St. Paul's" filled with bones; they regularly dine in a cave decorated by bas-reliefs that show it was used for embalming as well as eating; and they are invited to a ceremonial feast at which the torches are flaming human mummies as well as the severed limbs of those mummies.

The literal as well as metaphorical piling up of all this dead flesh reminds us, of course, that the womb of the Great Mother is also a tomb. But such mysterious preservation of the flesh also implies other and perhaps more uncanny points. In fact, the way in which the very idea of embalming is dramatized throughout *She* suggests that, for its author, this practice paradoxically evokes anxieties about both the ordinary world the Englishmen represent and the extraordinary realm She rules. With their perpetual repetition of the same character and the same message, for instance, the mummies evoke the dullness and dread associated with the imagined persistence of the self through history and thus the patriarchal horror of belatedness. At the same time, however, the practices that have preserved the mummies evoke an alien culture—Herodotus's peculiar Egypt as well as the strange Egypt that was being diligently studied in the nineteenth century. More than two thousand years old, She has not only been embalmed, She has been embalmed alive. Both destroyer and preserver, She has been, if not destroyed, at least spectacularly preserved. Significantly, however, She lacks the crucial third ability of creation, and just as significantly, She lacks the ultimate power of *self*-preservation. Implicit in such deficiencies, moreover, is the spectacular moment of Her destruction, a sexual climax that can be defined as a sort of apocalyptic primal scene.

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She is destroyed, of course, by the very flame of life that has heretofore preserved Her (and which at one time presumably created Her). She is quite unexpectedly annihilated by the "rolling pillar of Life" that has kept Her alive. The "rolling pillar of Life" that brings Haggard's romance to its apocalyptic climax is an almost theatrically rich sexual symbol. At regular intervals, it appears with a "grinding and crashing noise . . . rolling down like all the thunderwheels of heaven behind the horses of the lightning" and, as it enters the cave, it flames out "an awful cloud or pillar of fire, like a rainbow many colored," whose very presence causes Haggard's narrator to rejoice "in [the] splendid vigor of a new-found self." Such celestial radiance and regenerative power suggest that this perpetually erect symbol of masculinity is not just a Freudian penis but a Lacanian phallus, a fiery signifier whose eternal thundering return bespeaks the inexorability of the patriarchal Law She has violated in Her Satanically overreaching ambition.

As Henry Miller notes further, however, Ayesha's death is not just a death or even a "reduction" but, quite literally, a "devolution" in which Her very flesh is punished for Her presumption. As She passes through the stages of her unlived life, aging two thousand years in a few minutes, the "language strange" of her beauty shreds and flakes away, Her power wrinkles, Her magic dries up, and the meaning of her "terrible priority" is revealed as de-generation rather than generation. More terrible than the transformations of Dr. Jekyll or Dorian Gray, this "reduction" or "devolution" of goddess to beast is the final judgment upon Her pride and ambition.

*She* is not only a turn-of-the-century bestseller but also, in a number of dramatic ways, one of the century's literary turning points, a pivot on which the ideas and anxieties of the Victorians began to swivel into what has come to be called "the modern." If She is a classic *Belle Dame Sans Merci*, for instance, the stony wasteland that She rules is modern in its air of sexual and historical extremity. And certainly in England the ceremonial sexual act that brought about Her "reduction" or "devolution" was followed by a number of similar scenes in turn-of-the-century and modernist tales, ranging from Wilde's *Salome* (1894), Macdonald's *Lilith* (1895), and Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), to T. S.

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Eliot's "The Love Song of St. Sebastian," D. H. Lawrence's "The Woman Who Rode Away," and Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily." In all these works, a man or a group of men must achieve or at least bear witness to a ceremonial assertion of phallic authority that will free all men from the unmanning enslavement of Her land.

To notice that common anxieties impel these tales toward an uncommonly ferocious denouement is not, however, to understand the real psychological, social, and historical anxieties that underlie them. What, after all, worried Rider Haggard so much that he was driven to create his extraordinary complex fantasy about Her and Her realm in just six volcanically energetic weeks? Why did thousands and thousands of Englishmen respond to his dreamlike story of Her with as much fervor as if he had been narrating their own dreams? I believe that the charisma of this novel arose from the fact that the work itself explored and exploited three intimately interrelated contemporary phenomena: the nineteenth-century interest in Egypt, the nineteenth-century fascination with spiritualism, and the nineteenth-century obsession with the so-called New Woman.

It is significant that the wisdom of other cultures, and specifically the wisdom of ancient Egypt was gradually emerging in the nineteenth century through the work of spiritualist "adepts" like Madame Blavatsky, for spiritualism, with its different but equally serious emphasis on a realm of otherness, was the second contemporary phenomenon that Haggard's novel exploited. The novelist himself had actually been a spiritualist in his youth, attending séances presided over by women, which dramatized yet again the fragility of the control the rational western mind had achieved over a world of things and people that might at any moment assert a dangerously alien autonomy. Where both materialist science and traditional Christian theology declared that there was nothing (for the dead were, if anywhere, elsewhere), spiritualism seemed to prove that there was something. When theosophy, fostered by spiritualist ideas, summarized a set of radical hermeticist propositions about reality, reminding readers that, as Madame Blavatsky argued, such mysticism had always flowed like an underground river below western thought, patriarchal rationalism was even more seriously shaken. Finally, the appearance of Madame Blavatsky's notorious *Isis Unveiled*

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(1877) must have not only cemented the connections between the "adepts" of Egypt and such challenges to a commonly agreed-upon "reality," but also emphasized the link between—on the one hand—the alternative intellectual possibilities propounded by theosophy and—on the other hand—the possibilities of female rule, or misrule.

The figure of the New Woman, with its evocation of such unruly females as the Egyptian Cleopatra and the pseudo-Egyptologist Madame Blavatsky, vividly suggested an ultimate triumph of otherness. Feminist thinkers had long understood this point, quite conciously identifying their work for women's rights with such related challenges to patriarchal authority as spiritualism, abolitionism, and the Home Rule movement in Ireland. But even without overt articulations of the links between feminism and other antipatriarchal movements, the very idea of the New Woman was so threatening that her aspirations tended to evoke all the other subversive aspirations that were suddenly, or so it seemed, being voiced throughout the Empire, with some even being conveyed from the invisible world of the dead.

It is notable, too, that Haggard's adult reading as well as his childhood listening was at least at one point focused on the work of a female imagination: Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), the first bestselling novel ever written about Africa, which was, after all, a book by a woman, and a feminist one at that. Like Englishmen from Gladstone to Rhodes, Haggard read the book with fascination and excitement. At his first opportunity, he sought out its author to express his admiration, and his charismatically fierce Ayesha may even have been half-consciously modeled on Schreiner's fierce but equally charismatic Lyndall. At the same time, moreover, *She* may also have been half-consciously patterned on yet another work *about* the problem of feminist assertiveness: Tennyson's 1847 *The Princess*, in which, as in *She*, three bewildered men penetrate a female stronghold and explore the perils of role reversal.

It is no coincidence, therefore, that within a decade of *She's* publication two of Haggard's most sophisticated contemporaries recorded dreams and recounted adventures that drew upon the elaborate configuration of anxieties that *She* enacted. First,

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Sigmund Freud had a dream that, as his self-analysis revealed, depended heavily on details borrowed from *She*. In this dream, Freud wrote, he had been given a strange task that

> related to a dissection of the lower part of my own body, my pelvis and legs, which I saw before me as though in the dissecting-room. . . . Finally I was making a journey through a changing landscape with an Alpine guide who carried me [part of the way]. The ground was boggy; we went round the edge; . . . Before this I had been making my own way forward over the slippery ground with a constant feeling of surprise that I was able to do so well after the dissection. At last we reached a small wooden house at the end of which was an open window. There the guide set me down and laid two wooden boards, . . . so as to bridge the chasm which had to be crossed over from the window. At that point I really became frightened about my legs, [and] awoke in a mental fright.

As Freud himself rather dryly remarks, "a full analysis of this dream" would take up quite a number of pages, but he does undertake a partial explanation, which, significantly, emphasizes the influence of imagery drawn from *She*, a work he calls "A strange book . . . full of hidden meaning. . . . The eternal feminine, the immortality of our emotions. . ." and which, as one critic has recently argued, may have helped him conceptualize the psychic geography that was to be so crucial to his theory of "layered personality." What are we to make, though, of the fact that Freud's Haggardesque adventure begins with a pelvic dissection that implies a desexing and that his journey ends in feelings of impotence and terror? Like Leo and Holly, who have to be carried on litters into the womb/tomb that is Her land, Freud seems to have been castrated and infantilized early in this dream, so that when he is borne inward over slippery, boggy ground, it is hard, given his own hermeneutics, to avoid seeing his journey not as a classic trip into the self but as a voyage into the other, and specifically into an other who is horrifyingly female. His final despairing vision of "the chasm which had to be crossed" would inevitably, then, lead to a sense of failure and "mental fright," not because (as he suggests) he wonders how much

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longer his legs will carry him toward the end of his self-analysis, but because he fears that he will reach an end that must inevitably include an impotent confrontation of—even an engulfment in—the otherness of the female, whose power is shrouded in a darkness that lies at the heart of his own culture.

It is significant, however, that Freud's dream broods so insistently on "the chasm that had to be crossed" by means of narrow planks, for this frightening image derives, we should remember, from what is essentially the turning point of Haggard's tale. Holly, Leo, and Job can only bridge the gulf they must cross in order to reach the "place of Life" when, "like a great sword of flame, a beam from the setting sun [pierces] the . . . heart of the darkness" and they are given a symbolic preview of the fate in store for Ayesha. It is possible, therefore, that in his dream allusion to this moment, Freud was not only enacting crucial male anxieties but also offering himself a paradigmatically patriarchal hope, the hope of renewal through a reiteration of the Law of the Father.

Interestingly, the most important fin-de-siècle work that we can associate with *She* also pays tribute to this crucial moment. In his *Heart of Darkness* (1899), written not long after Freud dreamed this dream, Conrad designs for Marlow a pilgrimage whose guides and goal are as eerily female as those Holly and Leo must confront and conquer. Just as Leo and Holly must ritually pass through the matriarchal territory of the Amahaggar in order to reach Her deadly land of Kôr, for instance, Marlow must pass through an antechamber ruled by two "uncanny and fateful" women who are "guarding the door of Darkness." When he reaches a key way station on his African journey, moreover, he is "arrested" by "a small sketch in oils" done by the mysterious Kurtz, a totemic-seeming image of "a woman, draped and blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch." Vaguely evoking an image of justice, the picture disturbingly suggests the contradictions between power (the torch) and powerlessness (the blindfold) and thus it introduces the idea of the other who has been excluded and dispossessed but who, despite such subordination, exercises a kind of indomitable torchlike power.

Whether or not it is justified, the sense of the imminent

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danger She represents was shared not only by anxious romancers like Keats and Swinburne, Macdonald and Wilde, but also by such disparate figures as Joseph Conrad, Rider Haggard, and Sigmund Freud. There *is*, after all, to quote Conrad, "something ominous and stately in her deliberate progress" through the nineteenth century.


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# BOOKS

## A JEW WITHOUT PORTFOLIO

**THE STOLEN JEW. By Jay Neugeboren.** Holt, Rinehart and Winston. $14.95

*The Stolen Jew* is actually two novels. The one by Jay Neugeboren that you can hold in your hands and read (an act I unreservedly endorse) contains, almost intact, another novel by Neugeboren's protagonist, Nathan Malkin. In the forty years since Nathan wrote his novel, also called *The Stolen Jew*, it has become acclaimed as a classic and Nathan has abandoned writing in order to provide for his schizophrenic younger brother.

Now sixty-four, Nathan reflects bitterly on his spent youth and talent. His brother has just died. His brother's son encourages Nathan to write fiction again. But Nathan has a better idea: Knowing that his novel *The Stolen Jew* (which is about a nineteenth-century Russian Jew kidnapped to serve in the Czar's army) is popular in the Soviet Union for its severe anti-Czarist (and, Soviet officials believe, anti-Semitic) stance, Nathan forges an undiscovered manuscript of his classic and travels to Moscow with his nephew to sell the forgery to the Soviet government. The romantic nephew convinces Nathan to spend his scammed rubles on exit visas for dissidents, and he tricks Nathan into helping smuggle a "refusenik" dissident, a real-life stolen Jew, from a Soviet psychiatric prison, in a brisk climax to a long, rich, complex book.

Neugeboren's *The Stolen Jew* is a great rarity: complex to think about, easy to read. It can be read as an espionage tale, a love story, a Jewish novel, a historical novel, a metafiction, a psychological study, or even as a ghost story. Each genre of which *The Stolen Jew* partakes has its inherent weakness—love stories tend to sap; espionage tales tend to dull cynicism; ghost stories tend to ridiculous denouements. But Neugeboren's craft in interweaving his genres is such that he extracts each genre's strength, while discarding its foibles.

Neugeboren's love story, for example, between Nathan and his brother's widow Rachel, does occasionally verge on the bathetic. In one passage, they stroll through Prospect Park, which

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Neugeboren makes seem like an idyllic village green, right down to the touch of a Brooklyn cop on horseback tipping his hat and reminding them to call him for help "should anyone molest you." But Neugeboren can't afford to overindulge in sentiment, and he doesn't. (The next chapter plunges immediately into the opposite excess: taken from Nathan's *The Stolen Jew*, it describes the savagery of Cossack soldiers, told from the stolen Jew's point of view.) Even more than his deft scene shifting, Neugeboren's clear language vindicates *The Stolen Jew's* most sentimental passages.

Examine the resolution of Nathan's and Rachel's love affair in the final paragraph of the book.

> Below the table his knees were actually trembling, he realized. He felt like a very young and nervous boy. He shuddered. The four words had been in his head for weeks, he knew. For years. "Will you marry me?" he asked.
>
> "Yes, Nathan," she said. "Yes."

The allusion to *Ulysses* in Rachel's blooming affirmation is no great marvel. But Neugeboren's ease in making the allusion, while at the same time making it work for him, is. Molly Bloom fairly shrieks her "Yes"; Rachel barely whispers hers. But the reader hears both of them at once. And that is the achievement of this book: the pleasurable reconciliation of opposites.

Neugeboren's cleverest dialogue, for example, crops up during his most serious scenes. Whenever Nathan is alone after his brother's death, the dead brother suddenly materializes to chat. These long eerie dialogues on subjects like the nature of sanity and the purpose of death are filled with outrageous puns, ridiculous bilingual witticisms and insults—all delivered in a rapid-fire, (dead) brotherly manner.

*The Stolen Jew* finally does so many things at once that the reader finds himself picking and choosing among his sources of pleasure. Someone who chooses not to enjoy Nathan's repartee with his ghostly brother and characters can still derive pleasure from these uncanny scenes. A Freudian reader would call these conversations an expiation of Nathan's guilt. A spiritualist would say that his brother's ghost is actually haunting Nathan. A novelist would recognize Nathan's construction of imaginary

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dialogues in order to better understand his characters. A literary critic would comment that through this device the taciturn Nathan is being manipulated by Neugeboren into revealing more of himself than he otherwise could in conventional dialogue or thought. And they would all be right.

And they would all be enjoying themselves. For all the structural integrity of *The Stolen Jew*, no scene is forced to fit a pattern. Although Nathan is the author of *The Stolen Jew* and the main character in another *The Stolen Jew*, and although the outer book is peppered with quotations and whole chapters of the inner, Nathan never becomes a literary device before he is a person. The old box-within-the-box trick is not being performed because (as with, say, John Barth) the author thinks it a jim-dandy idea, or because (as with John Irving) the author needs the inner quotations to assert his protagonist's literary skills, or because (as with Philip Roth) the author wishes to blur artfully the line between his own life and his protagonist's life. No, this fiction-within-a-fiction serves Nathan Malkin's needs before Jay Neugeboren's. As hard as Nathan is in life, he can express his true tenderness only in his fiction.

Just as the true Nathan exists exclusively neither in his emotional fiction nor in his cold personal comportment, but rather in both of them at once, so does Neugeboren's book unify contradictions. "My child is alive, my child is dead," Nathan's mother used to wail about his brother's insanity, and Nathan thinks the same thought about the book he wrote while young and rewrote as an old man: "My book is alive, my book is dead." Riddled with four-letter words like *love, home, soul, loss, hero,* whose obscene sentimentality has deadened many another book, *The Stolen Jew* manages nevertheless to come vibrantly alive.

**STEVEN GOLDLEAF**

## REINVENTING FREUD

**FREUD: BIOLOGIST OF THE MIND: BEYOND THE PSYCHOANALYTIC LEGENDS. By Frank J. Sulloway.** Basic Books, $23.50.

Although Frank Sulloway takes the biologistic Wilhelm Fliess as the real hero of Freud's early development, his avowedly

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sociobiological perspective raises the questions that Fliess's theory of genetic bisexuality only implied: that gender must be different from sexuality as such; that genetically keyed regression cannot account for the technicalities of individual desire; that, above all, the assumption of innate developmental timetables is prescriptive. This liberal critique of genetics is reaffirmed and extended in its analogy in poetics—a realm Sulloway dismisses from both Freud's speculations and his own, ignoring Burke's and Trilling's insistence that Freud maps the mind as a receptacle of social symbols rather than as a physiological reflex. By implication, then, Freud's apparently scientific texts are themselves elaborate symbolic documents that are to be read figuratively, just as the mind itself is to be read as an apparatus designed by the symbolic laws of culture and its history.

The biogenetic Sulloway, however, announces that Freud meant his biological metaphors "literally," thereby linking his own methodological commitment to the physiological with what he takes to be a crude referentiality in Freud himself. Sulloway reduces even the allegorical *Totem and Taboo* by taking it at its word, as though the events Freud purports to describe there—the killing of the father by the fraternal horde, Freud's orginary myth for the birth of civilization—actually took place. "Freud fully believed," says Sulloway, "that some such prehistoric drama had to have occurred if his various psychoanalytic claims about repression, sexuality, and neurosis were to possess universal truth."

But these assumptions about the epistemological status of both texts and people have political consequences. Does language, for instance, whether in Freud's text or in the world at large, refer simply to natural facts, to a world of natural law beyond culture? Or does it refer instead to the symbolic machinery of culture itself, which produces and situates the mind in its web, just as the symbolic machinery of language produces and situates Freud's writing? The implausibility of Sulloway's alternative becomes especially apparent when we see that by taking *Totem and Taboo* literally—by assuming it simply names things—Sulloway reconstitutes the mistake of the original seduction theory: that something had really happened in the past to set later events in motion. Indeed, if the "repressed impulses" that "generate phantasy"—for example, of seduction as an infant—are really the "spontaneous" recapitulation in the individual of

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the history of the race as a whole, Sulloway has only succeeded in asking us to believe in the reality of something even more remote than what Freud's patients had reported in their own lives. Sulloway's assertion that Freud saw a difference between what he calls "truth" and "charged fiction" in the original seduction theory already shows how unaware Sulloway is of the real change: Freud's acceptance of "charged fiction" as itself the "truth" of a psychic, not an objective, reality. Thus Sulloway's attempt to biologize Freud is largely antipathetic to the very factor that distinguishes psychoanalysis from the start: its conviction that soma is a consequence of psyche, not, as Sulloway proposes, its cause. "Freud," wrote Philip Rieff more than twenty years ago, "puts language before body."

To be sure, objections will inevitably arise that state the case for real reference even apart from genetics. One example is Freud's Schreber, whose hallucinations Morton Schatzman's *Soul Murder* has shown to have the "real" referents that a Laingian epistemology requires. But what we witness in such argumentation is less a real debate than an active demonstration of the bifurcated possibilities that Freud's work has always possessed. It is in fact the generative dissonance in Freud himself that allows Sulloway, like his ironic bedfellow Jung, to find as much evidence for his position as he does, and that also allows the sociological Freudians to find the rival evidence that positions them against the literal-minded reductionists. It is, however, precisely the overdetermined structure of both Freud and his legacy that Sulloway does not wish to see despite his duties as a cultural historian. Like dreams and neurotic symptoms, Freud's writings can hardly be said to be irreducible in their sources or their meanings whatever a given researcher's skill or perseverance. The overdeterminations that allow symptoms to develop in Freud's view of the mind are akin in structure to the overdeterminations that situate Freud's work within the honeycomb of intellectual history, and that make it available to a variety of persuasive readings at once, depending on the selective key—biology, linguistics, romanticism, modernism—by which the historian organizes it. Sulloway so little understands overdetermination that the influences his scholarship has unearthed make him wonder aloud (recalling Norman Fruman and the case of Coleridge) whether Freud should be called a plagiarist. That any

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writer or movement would be defensive in the self-image it presents strikes Sulloway as somehow odd, and sets him in a realm altogether apart from psychoanalysis.

Even more puzzling, however, is Sulloway's anxiety that the demonstration of exact influences upon Freud may seem to belittle him—more, it should be added, in the author's eyes than in the reader's. Why Sulloway grows guilty about the apparent success of his manifest intention may have more to do with an uneasiness that he has no theory of influence subtle enough to suit his subject than with any concern about the kind of romantic originality that his genetic presuppositions implicitly require him to reject. But perhaps what unconsciously frightens Sulloway after all is the same failing that links his politics with his poetics, a fear that the very categories and aims of his own study—those of texts, ideas, of human history and intellectual achievement—are to be dismissed by the genetic biology in whose service he writes. To deny the symbolic dimension of psychoanalysis, as Sulloway does, is to deny the symbolic status of culture itself.

**PERRY MEISEL**

## IMAGES OF THE PAST

**THE INCORPORATION OF AMERICA: CULTURE AND SOCIETY IN THE GILDED AGE. By Alan Trachtenberg.** Hill and Wang. $16.95.

If one takes expressions of aspiration seriously, especially those of younger historians, the future of the discipline lies in the field of cultural history. Yet as more and more scholars identify themselves as cultural historians, the problem of method becomes more pressing. Those recent works in the field generally accounted to be successes exemplify two versions of the same method. They take either an event or a thread in the culture and subject it to a mode of analysis that is essentially prismatic, penetrating multifaceted surfaces or layers of meaning. One thinks, for instance, of the work of Neil Harris on early American artists and on P. T. Barnum, of Warren Susman's essay on the 1939 World's Fair, of Mary Ryan's study of the bourgeois family, of

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the exploration of witchcraft in Salem by Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum. Or, to shift to works in European history by American academics and closely studied by Americanists, one should mention Lawrence Stone's huge book on sex, marriage, and family; Natalie Davis's essays on early modern France; and Carl Schorske's study of fin de siècle Vienna. So far, however, no one has found adequate means for translating the current quest for cultural history into a general narrative or interpretive synthesis.

In *The Incorporation of America* Alan Trachtenberg takes up the challenge of synthesis. He ambitiously seeks to "cover" the cultural history of the last quarter of the nineteenth century in a general work falling, unfortunately, somewhat ambiguously between the genres of textbook and trade book. It is a brave and commendable attempt, but it falls short. And the failure probably tells us less about this particular effort than it does about the state of the art within the discipline. There is much theoretical work undone in the field of cultural history, and until it is done we shall all be vulnerable.

Trachtenberg presents the book as a study of the transformation of cultural perceptions in the formative period of corporate capitalism. The story, so to speak, concerns the "emergence of a changed, more tightly structured society with new hierarchies of control, and also changed conceptions of that society." At times he refers to the *effect* of business incorporation in the wider culture and society, while at other times he seems to have in mind a more general and complex process embracing business and other cultural realms. To the extent that he offers a thesis, it is that the process of change "proceeded by contradiction and conflict" and that the "corporate system in business, politics, and cultural institutions engendered opposing views." He observes further that this "opposition remained"—though his own evidence and the interpretations of others suggest that these cultures of resistance survived this period very much enfeebled.

The seven chapters that follow these introductory statements treat, in order: the West, mechanization, labor and capital, the city, politics and genteel culture, literary realism, and the Chicago fair. It should be apparent that these chapters imply at best a truncated vision of American experience. Even within the frame of the themes he does cover, certain omissions are immediately apparent. This book on culture and society barely men-

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tions schools and churches, and the chapter on mechanization refers almost exclusively to mechanization in connection with the production and distribution of goods. Having taken the title of his chapter from Sigfried Giedion, Trachtenberg seems not to have noticed that Giedion devotes considerable attention to the mechanization of the domestic environment. And this directs us to the most striking omission of all, the almost total absence of women in this book—whether as migrants west, as workers, as managers of domestic environments, as writers, or anything else.

To present a study of the reorganization of perceptions would seem to entail an analysis of changes in the social forms sustaining these perceptions—both the discarded and the newly embraced perceptions. But except for rhetorical references to macrosocial changes, Trachtenberg does not connect social perception to social history. No social institutions—whether traditional or novel—are presented for detailed analysis. It is not enough to say in defense of this method, as he does, that he is preoccupied with figurative language because "figures of speech, tropes, images, metaphors" are "materials of premier historical interest." While this may be true—and while I certainly appreciate the way Trachtenberg in the American studies tradition brings literary theory to bear on historical analysis—it is insufficient for a book that takes as its subject "culture and society." There is, as Raymond Williams showed when he followed *Culture and Society* (1958) with *The Long Revolution* (1961), serious social history to be done in this sort of analysis.

One gets little sense of the dimensions or processes of change during this crucial quarter-century. There are no portraits of the older America or the new America, nor is there a narrative of the process whereby America ceased being the one and became the other. One misses, in other words, some of the things one usually finds in a work of history—chronology and sequence, causation, synchronic connections illuminating both homological relationships across the culture and instances of differential rates and patterns of change.

*The Incorporation of America* is a book laced with penetrating perceptions, some absolutely incandescent, but they are seldom developed. And rarely do they depend upon specific historical analysis or evidence. Thus they do not fit into nor add up to a coherent historical interpretation. Ironically, this book of leftish sensibility reminds me most of Daniel Boorstin's *The*

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*Americans: The Democratic Experience* (1973) because of its formlessness and its ultimately ahistorical mode of discourse. It is cultural history lacking a grounding in theory, and it is without interpretive form.

All of this is unfortunate, because Trachtenberg's notion of incorporation does have interpretive possibilities that are unnecessarily obscured in this book. If, instead of trying to embrace everything (however selectively), he had undertaken a series of disciplined and interconnected forays in a prismatic fashion, he might have succeeded in illuminating the inner dynamics and meanings of one of the period's major themes. By thinking of incorporation, as Trachtenberg occasionally does, as the transfer of the social distribution of knowledge, authority, and power upward into large, hierarchical structures, we have a way of narrating, interpreting, and judging a process of delocalization and delegitimation that reconstructed the form and structure of American culture across a wide spectrum of experience.

What he says happened to knowledge and power in the work process under corporate capitalism can be extended to other dimensions of culture. Knowledge was consolidated in management and power was gathered into hierarchical structures organized for economic warfare. This new form replaced the pattern of mutuality and cooperation sustained by the traditional culture of the work place and, probably, the working-class community. But to develop such a theme one must go more deeply into the historical process of change. There must be some explanation of the dynamics or, more precisely, the dialectic whereby conflicts in the older pattern of culture generated the new one. In many of the areas of culture and society discussed by Trachtenberg one finds analogous developments. It is apparent in the cultural battle between town ways and metropolitan ways, as well as in the changes in the meaning and location of knowledge associated with the professionalization of competence and in the building of museums and other major cultural institutions, which, in Trachtenberg's words, represented an "infrastructure which monumentalized the presence of culture, of high art, and learning." Works as diverse as those of Samuel P. Hays on political parties and reform, of Lawrence Goodwyn on Populists, and of David Rothman on the Senate all suggest ways in which this theme could be developed in respect to politics. And Trachtenberg's fine discussion of Thomas Edison and electrifi-

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cation reveals how mechanization, or at least a particular pattern of its development, raised the level of control through systemization. All of these dimensions—and others—of his notion of incorporation converge in the Chicago World's Fair, the subject of what already is Trachtenberg's strongest chapter.

That Trachtenberg failed to reap the full benefits of his theme can be traced to his—and perhaps the discipline's—unpreparedness for such synthesis as he attempted. I certainly do not want to discourage synthesis and large interpretation; nothing is more needed in the profession at this moment. But some things cannot be done simply because they ought to be or need to be. Since the collapse of the progressive synthesis, American historians have lacked a compelling image of the past. With that synthesis first challenged by the so-called consensus historians and more recently and importantly by the proliferating and rich literature emphasizing regional, racial, ethnic, class, and gender differences in the American experience, historians have struggled without success for a conceptualization of the past that is responsive to the complexity of the past yet compelling as narrative interpretation. Trachtenberg lacked the means for what he attempted, and he failed to write a good book. He almost certainly would have written a better book had he stuck closer to the mode of his previous one and the pattern of those rather successful works I mentioned at the outset. But such advice is, perhaps, at once unfair to Trachtenberg and self-defeating to all of us. He had the courage to attempt what everyone else has eschewed. And even his failure forces us to confront crucial historiographical problems that have paralyzed most of us.

**THOMAS BENDER**

## ANTI-INFLATIONARY FICTION

**ETERNAL CURSE ON THE READER OF THESE PAGES. By Manuel Puig.** Random House. $13.50.
**AUNT JULIA AND THE SCRIPTWRITER. By Mario Vargas Llosa.** Translated by Helen R. Lane. Farrar, Straus, & Giroux. $16.50.

By the mid-seventies, when the so-called boom in Latin American fiction finally echoed in the United States,

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Victoria Ocampo had already remarked that if there was a boom there was also inflation; José Donoso had predicted that the large Latin American novels would yield to more modest ones in reaction to the literary aggrandizing that claimed the entire fictional world as its rightful territory. To date, neither proposition has been much tested by critical reference to these works as they appear in translation: First of all, the boom is hollow, with neither established intellectual nor esthetic aims (no deflation intended; rather, a recognition of the boom as the product of a grouping of writers, a mutual fund, not a corporate takeover, to perpetuate the financial metaphor). Second, these books are each greeted as discrete explosions, with little attempt to see them in relation to the author's previous writings and almost no attempt to view seriously the interaction of these writers, whose society is anything but anonymous. In reading Carlos Fuentes's novelistic dirigibles—*Terra Nostra*, for example—who considers their literary worth compared to that of his early wraith *Aura*? Yet inflation matters, qualitatively and quantitatively—especially in light of the premise that Latin American fiction tends to excellence in proportion to its brevity, with Borges's fictions as axiomatic proof and García Márquez's failure to float another big novel as tempting argument. (Do people keep telling you, too, that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* doesn't hold up to a second reading, except as a series of fabulous incidents?)

Anti-inflationary tactics of differing kinds control two Latin American novels recently published in the United States. Manuel Puig is one of the writers Donoso predicted, and his career can be seen from a certain angle as that of putting the novel on a strict diet, both thematically and formally. From the start, his subject has been the social outsider who is actually the insider by virtue of having introjected the cultural clichés available to him. Puig's early characters were smalltimers whose petty lives developed in the reductive grandeur of popular communication. Creatures of the mass-media arts (radio, television, movies), they found their expression by approximating those media, whose means became Puig's: Advertising jingles, tango lyrics, Hollywood scripts are all presented dramatically, with an increasing authorial absence that stands out like the black pages proffering photos in old-fashioned scrapbooks. Recently, Puig has concentrated on political and psychological clichés as well, so that in *Kiss of the Spider Woman* and now *Eternal Curse* the

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characters are comparably petty and manipulative, but the book deals with issues and objects potentially affecting larger groups. The implicit politic has become explicit. *Eternal Curse*, for instance, stages a series of dialogues between Larry, a young man down on his luck, and Ramirez, an aging Argentine whom he's caring for in a Greenwich Village nursing home. In the course of their conversations, recorded in the underfed prose of Puig's debut in his own English, Larry discovers that the old Ramirez has encoded his revolutionary history in some romantic novels, which Larry then hopes to decode and publish, thereby establishing his academic career. Both men use and cruelly thwart each other—Ramirez tries to regain a hold on his affective life through imagination and role playing, the would-be historian attempts to extort the documents and hence a profession. The novel's subject nicely dovetails the psychological with the political, expressed in an interchangeable vocabulary: "It could be an important document about resistance to repression"; "Flirtation and repression go hand-in-hand, and there has to be repression in order to derive pleasure from flirtation."

Restricting himself to the spoken words of his characters and a few circumstantial documents, Puig has taken another step toward successfully realizing the Jamesian goal of the fully dramatized novel: the book itself is an updating and slimming down of *The Aspern Papers*. But Puig's regimen is so fierce that he has created anorexic fiction, whose control of physical form replaces expression of feeling, leading to withering and possible extinction. No Miss Tina collects our sympathy in *Eternal Curse*, and Puig lets neither Larry nor Ramirez capture much interest, perhaps because initially *he* was too interested. A note printed on the novel's dust jacket quotes the author:

> This novel was born of a crisis I went through. I had returned to New York from a trip, spiritually and morally exhausted. Within a few days I spotted this man, while I was working out in a gym. He was young, healthy, handsome. "I'd like to be like him," I thought. I got to know him and soon discovered that he was morally bankrupt. The book is the outcome of a series of interviews I did with him.

*Eternal Curse* is a series of interviews between two spiritually and morally exhausted individuals hankering to live off of and

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through each other, while the author hovers, conspicuously remote from this psychic cannibalism (both *Totem and Taboo* and another variety of *Sexual Politics*), never permitting us the initial attraction. We never think of either Larry or Ramirez, "I'd like to be like him," nor are we enticed by any evil in either that might give us some satisfaction in *not* being like them. Again, like the anorexic, Puig focuses so much attention on the visible aftereffect of nourishing matter that in fighting (and winning) to control it, he loses all sense of its appetizing quality. So do we. Because the only solvency Puig permits himself is formal, we end the book bankrupt too, except in continuing admiration for Puig's dedicated, scrupulous, and intelligent, though never intellectualized, inquiry into dramatic compression as a mode of writing novels.

Mario Vargas Llosa's novel is also based on autobiography. While Puig limits us to the transcription of his characters' speeches, and, notably, to that of their silences, Vargas Llosa never lets us directly experience any of the nine radio scripts composed by the novel's alter-protagonist, a Colombian scriptwriter. Nor does Vargas Llosa quote any of the short stories written by his surrogate, Varguitas, in the book's eleven other chapters. These tell the adventures of the eighteen-year-old author in a romantic escapade that culminates in marriage to a thirty-two-year-old woman who is legally his aunt, and of his day-to-day work at a radio station. At the station he meets the heroic hack, who writes ten scripts in ten hours each day, spending another seven rehearsing, acting, and directing these radio dramas. Alternating the unconfessional (though true) love tale with installments of the radio cliff-hangers, Vargas Llosa plainly enjoys himself, as will the reader, especially given the inventiveness of the book's translator, Helen R. Lane. While repugnance feeds Puig's formal retreat from his subject and disguises his nourishing complicity, Vargas Llosa's amiability and lack of bitterness show in his dedication to the eponymous Julia, his first wife and romantic object of his novel, in the genial melodrama of his youthful love, and in the mock-seriousness of the radio soap operas. Vargas Llosa never forgets that a novelist's basis for *ergo sum* is *I write* (with emphasis on the pronoun) or that he is the supreme superviser in this double-stranded narrative. Cutting back on the multiple, overlapping points of view in his earlier

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works, he substitutes for their complex social realism a comparatively minor reflection epitomized in the book's clever epigraph from Salvador Elizondo: "I write. I write that I am writing. Mentally, I see myself writing that I am writing. . . ." Free to play with the kitsch achieved by a fanatically serious writer as opposed to the unrealized art of a fantasizing writer—both of which he embraces in his own flow of words—the mature Vargas Llosa now successfully looks back on his early life and career in cheerfully light, interchanging doses of pleasant eros and hysterical sublimation.

Readers obviously love the result, with the book achieving great sales in the original Spanish version and, ironically, inspiring both a TV series and another version of the affair by Julia, now turned writer herself. Nevertheless, Varguitas is not fully characterized (should he be in a book with a slyly mythic opening: "*En ese tiempo remoto*"?); Aunt Julia's charm is more a matter of report than demonstration; and the scriptwriter Pedro Camacho, who displays a bundle of traits and a history that begs to be unfolded, never comes to the Dickensian or even Bellowing life his persona implies because Vargas Llosa insists on putting his "storied story" first—right up to the double denouement of Pedro's slide into madness and Aunt Julia's eclipse by cousin Patricia, Vargas Llosa's second wife.

Often accused in his big novels of pouring the old wine of Balzac into the tricky new bottles of contemporary technique, Vargas Llosa demonstrates here, as in *Capt. Pantoja*, that he knows there is no new wine and that he's putting old bottles inside new ones, some with large capacities, as in *Conversation in the Cathedral* or *The Green House*, some smaller, as in his last two books. The technical facility and cleverness for which he is well-known characterize both these recent works, but he has pared their scope and leavened them with previously rejected humor. Recalling the elaborate cross-cutting and splicing of the panoramic novels that made him famous, some critics miss the social and political implications central to this work and challenge *Aunt Julia* as being no more attractive than its popular serials and fluffy romance, as if Vargas Llosa, unlike Puig, had not made literature *from* such stuff but had patched it together *with* such stuff. The Colombian novelist Gustavo Álvarez Gardeazábal fingered this group of readers when he accused

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some Latin American critics of arguing against *Aunt Julia* precisely because they had enjoyed reading it. Fashionably alert to its own narrowing nature as writing, *Aunt Julia* is, of course, a slip of a book alongside *The Green House*; but Vargas Llosa's next novel, already crashingly successful in Europe and Latin America, offers us an apocalyptic panorama under the title of *La guerra del fin del mundo* (*The War of the End of the World*). *Capt. Pantoja* and *Aunt Julia* do not indicate a permanent shrinkage in the Peruvian author; instead, they show him buckling his plots with humor and making much of less.

Whether this has any more to do with his reading of Puig than with his publicized jogging, no one can really tell. As early as his novella *The Cubs*, Vargas Llosa let elements of pop culture, such as song lyrics, reflect the words of his characters and express the quality as well as the source of their consciousness. He did not develop this device, however, until *Capt. Pantoja*, which intersected Puig's extensive use of newspaper clippings, bureaucratic reports, and epistolary colloquialism to achieve forthright humor and satire as well as plot. To be sure, the device is neither new nor unique—we can recall Cortázar's *A Manual for Manuel* and, microscopically, Joyce's bathetic newspaper story in "A Painful Case"—but the radical nature of its development in Puig and the subsequent radical departure of Vargas Llosa give it new meaning in the context of Latin American literature. Vargas Llosa is not abandoning the large seriousness of his previous work, anymore than Puig is forgetting how to laugh. Vargas Llosa exhibits flexibility by stepping away from his notorious "totalizing" attempts, which provoked a North American reviewer to quip that "Latin Americans don't so much write novels as cater them." Puig's reduction of that big spread in *Eternal Curse* may follow too much previous dieting, but his book is fertilely stark and, anyway, not the last he'll write (two, as a matter of fact, await translation) while Vargas Llosa's retrenching pleases as it absolves us of the ultimate condescension: requiring that we find a masterpiece in every work from a culture that confesses underdevelopment.

**RONALD CHRIST**

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## ALL NOVELS

**SABBATICAL: A ROMANCE. By John Barth.** G. P. Putnam's Sons. $14.95.

About half of the world's great novels set out to do one thing. Jane Austen never seeks to make *Emma* anything but a classic novel of manners. And no matter how diverse the sources of Austen's imagination and how vexed the morals of her novel, *Emma* is always just that—a classic novel, not an aspiring epic, not a romance. *Père Goriot* is a novel, melodramatic perhaps but a novel, not another thing. And Forster, in *Howard's End,* is working the territory laid out by two centuries of ancestors, and although the culture is altered, the generic imperatives are not.

The other half of the world's great novels set out to be all books—not intentionally perhaps but along the way. *Don Quixote,* by common consent, sets out to be antiromance. Dreaming the impossible dream, that crazy hidalgo turns the book into romance. The English eighteenth century thought it nonstop farce, and in a sense it is. Praised by Auerbach and others before and since for its fidelity to the texture of seventeenth-century Spanish dailiness, the book seems to be a novel. It has been described, more than a few times, as an epic. Robert Alter surprises no one by placing it at the origins of the reflexive tradition, a long and brilliant body of books about books. And to an influential group of Hispanists, it is no prose fiction at all but a sacred text.

*Tom Jones* is all books. It provides information, then suckers the readers into pseudo-information. It draws upon the heritage of Western man at once for support and mockery. It promises epic and delivers alehouses, while remaining in some quite plausible sense, epic. It promises no illusions and it presents none, while giving us bastard turned gentleman, love conquering all. *Ulysses* is the culmination of the impulse to make not a novel but an excursion through the infinite possibilities of prose fiction: everything, the panoramic and the private life, the solipsistic and the communal, the verbalistic and the representational, the red and the black, the agony and the ecstasy, love and death, war and peace.

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Barth has, from the start, tended toward that assimilative, encyclopedic mode. *End of the Road* seems to be a dispassionate waltz of ideas. Yet it would be a strange reader who was not deeply involved and deeply moved by its human drama. More than a few times, Barth has taken his fictions to the farther edge of reflexivism, creating stories about themselves, about language, about telling stories. Yet there always remains a classic core of "about-ness": along with the country of the mind, the geography of the Eastern shore; along with a concern for the terminality of fictional forms, a concern for the relations of men and women; in short, an involvement with the world of culture and experience beyond the black marks on the white page.

"'You and I agree,'" says Fenwick, Barth's protagonist, "'that a story with nothing fantastic in it lacks something essential. But how can we stick the fantastic into the middle of Chesapeake Bay in the May and June of 1980?'" Fenwick and his wife of seven years, Susan, turn over the question of the fantastic. Is a CIA plot to assassinate a troublesome agent in the Chesapeake Bay fantastic? Is it fantastic if the eliminating is done by the KGB? Is a sea monster fantastic? "'It won't work,'" says Susan. "'You can have fabulous sea monsters, or sperms and eggs that talk; you can have Fenwick and Susan. But you can't mix the two together. The four.'" "'Scheherazade would,'" replies Fenwick. "'Shakespeare would. We can do anything that we can do, Suse. And what we can't do as Fenn and Susan, we can do as Author.'"

And so *Sabbatical* seeks to be all novels, less parodic and ludic than most of Barth but more mellow and tender than anything he has written, reflexive, at moments funny and inventive, at other moments documentary, almost dogged, invaded by the eeriness of public events. It is, at moments, a spy story with a character at the center who hates spy stories. It is, at moments, a realistic novel by an author who is on record as finding the realistic novel irrelevant. And it is a love story by an author who discovers, as he goes on, that sustaining the continuity of that love story is, well, boring.

Briefly, it is the story of Fenwick and Susan, on a Chesapeake Bay cruise, very much in love. Along the way occurs the mutual question of how they will write this book. Also along the way is the question of CIA executive John Arthur Paisley, mysteriously murdered, apparently, on his boat in Chesapeake Bay, in the real

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world, not in the imagination of Barth, with interspersed columns of the *Baltimore Sun* to buttress the speculation. Along the way are excursions into ancestry: The two principals may have descended from Poe and Francis Scott Key. And along the way is a network of other relationships, including Eastwood Ho and Edgar Allen Ho, Vietnamese-Americans. If the novel sounds improvisatory, it is. If it sounds encyclopedic, it is that too, with information on the marine biology of the Chesapeake Bay, speculations on the minor works of Poe, and descriptions of the erotic responses of the two principals.

Such fiction runs a considerable risk. As the jargon has it, it is "performative." It asks us not to attend to what is being said but to how it is being done. The risk is that it's all like a high-wire act. Performative art lays itself under the obligation of being consistently stylish and absorbing in its execution. A high-wire act is not all style, to be sure. There is the threat that the performer will fall. Barth, as I have suggested, allows himself lapses from performance. The navigational details, the concern about the CIA in Chile, and Maryland, are not performed; they are descents into the world of daily events and flat prose. But most consistently, *Sabbatical* asks to be judged as performance. And the risk is that the reader, like the spectator at the circus, will look for a stylishness of execution, page by page, which this book simply cannot deliver.

That was always Barth's best card. Readers who cared about *The Floating Opera, The Sot-Weed Factor,* and *Chimera* found the inventiveness utterly ingenious, the manner charismatic, and the wit irresistible. If the realistic novel was exhausted, whatever Barth was doing would serve very well in its place. Readers of *Sabbatical,* on the other hand, are likely to find the performance, as performance, often charming, ingenious, but just as often self-indulgent and confusing.

Fictions that seek to be all novels sustain their invention (invention which is sometimes self-indulgent and confusing) by attaching the authorial performance to a myth. There is the myth at the center of *Don Quixote* which may shift and evolve but remains intact. Fielding can shift his voice and perform an extraordinary variety of effects because the myth is consistently there, a banal myth perhaps, but one with a powerful, consensual, culture-based capacity to mean something. So it always is, with

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those encyclopedic novels that survive. Nabokov can do so many things with *Lolita* because that perverse and haunting myth that forms its obsessive center never moves out of sight. With *Sabbatical,* there is no center, no myth. And although the love story is credible and often moving, it is not likely to strike very many readers as having the authority of other novels that are encyclopedic and performative—*One Hundred Years of Solitude, The Tin Drum.*

Barth has given the images of absurdity a special concreteness, from the very start, in his first, stunning novels, at the same time persuading the reader of the continuing energy of the narrative imagination. This time, he reaches for an affirmative center, two people in love and married, the male figure seemingly very like Barth. No one doubts that the relationship is deeply felt. But there remains a private, gossipy quality to it: it never gathers the shared, cultural quality of a myth. And thus the acts of performance that cluster around that fragile center, when they begin to seem less than brilliant, seem—less than brilliant.

**PHILIP STEVICK**

## SOULS ON ICE

**FREUD AND MAN'S SOUL. By Bruno Bettelheim.** Alfred A. Knopf. $11.95.

In *Freud and Man's Soul,* Bruno Bettelheim maintains that most of the misunderstandings and polemics surrounding psychoanalysis in the English-speaking world are due to faulty translations, to distortions that cannot be explained rationally. That he himself, and all the other psychoanalysts of his generation whose native language was German and who later on practiced in English, remained silent, he continues, was due to the fact that either Freud or his daughter Anna, both of whom mastered the English language perfectly, approved every translation; to the reverence accorded them; and to the difficulties of the task.

Bettelheim overcame his reluctance, he tells us, because someone who shared Freud's cultural background had to, and

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time was running out. Lack of time, also, allegedly forced him to choose only some of the most blatant of the many mistranslations—or was it lack of space in *The New Yorker* where this book of 112 pages first appeared? In any event, writing for a rather broad popular audience about such a complex topic was bound to entail simplifications.

But Bettelheim is correct, when he begins by showing how Vienna's cultural climate influenced the creation of psychoanalysis, and how its practice in Austria and America, then and now, had to diverge; when he exemplifies how, again and again, the English translators, confronted with a number of options, chose the most science-oriented word; or when he explains how concepts and words such as Eros and Psyche, and the Oedipus saga, originating in classical myths every Austrian schoolchild knows, tend to become abstractions to those unfamiliar with all the ramifications of these myths. Yet, can we really blame the mistranslations in the Standard Edition alone, for the fact that Freud's innate humanism and his concern for the "soul" were played down; that Bettelheim's staff—all of whom had read Freud—at the Orthogenic School for disturbed children in Chicago, were unable to relate emotionally to their patients in the way Bettelheim himself could; or that over the years, his American students tended to intellectualize psychoanalysis rather than to benefit from it personally? After all, Freud frequently had insisted on turning his discoveries about the unconscious into a science; he too had worried about how institutional and national exigencies reflected on both the reception and practice of psychoanalysis; the importance he attributed to energy derived from sexuality and libido rather than from survival and ego needs, already in the 1920s, was criticized by German-speaking sociologists and psychoanalysts as suffering from naturalism and biologism; and intellectualization, we have learned, is more likely due to personal defenses and inadequate analyses rather than to how we read Freud. Yet, the general preference, in America, for science and behaviorism over humanism might alone have influenced translations, so that even the existence of a "perfect" rendering of Freud's humanistic intent might have been ignored, and might not have stopped the medicalization and scientificization of psychoanalysis.

Still, Bettelheim's theme—that Freud's very carefully se-

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lected words were carelessly, or even willfully, translated—is plausible. Freud apparently chose to talk of Psyche rather than of its German equivalent *Seele* (soul), because of the charming Eros's love for this Greek goddess, thus incorporating even her name in his work, in "psychoanalysis," because of his "wish to emphasize . . . the neglected and hidden aspects of our souls." Freud's emotions, however, are long forgotten in the "science" we know. And had "psyche" been translated as "soul", it would have been difficult to avoid religious overtones. But, suggests Bettelheim, almost any other word, or words, would have been more appropriate than the use of "mental" or "mind." He argues that *"Das Ich und das Es"* instead of becoming "The Ego and the Id" should have become "The I and the it"; that *"Die Zerlegung der Psychischen Persönlichkeit,"* literally "The Taking Apart of the Psychic Personality," was distorted as "The Anatomy of the Mental Personality"; and that the concept of superego, the *Über-Ich,* would have been better called the "Above-I," "Over-I," or "Upper-I." All these errors, and the many others, are blamed on "an unconscious desire to create emotional distance from the impact of personal pronouns," on an overreliance on medical language and its habit of latinizing. Greek words as well were allegedly introduced to indicate that psychoanalysis is a scientific enterprise, as when *Fehlleistung* (faulty achievement) became "parapraxis," or *Besetzung* (occupation) was turned into "cathexis."

Not only a person of Bettelheim's generation who knew Freud, and who had the privilege of reading his articles as they appeared, but younger people who know German, will agree with the criticism of the translations, and might regret the neglect of Freud's humanistic intent. And they might add other examples to the ones given in this book—why *Übertragung* became "transference," or why Freud's idiosyncratic abbreviations such as UBw or Ubw (for *unbewusst*—unconscious) did not receive more attention. Those who have followed French psychoanalysis will wonder, in addition, why Bettelheim, who praises the French for rendering *das Ich* as *le moi, das Es* as *le ça* or *le soi,* and the *Über-Ich* as *le surmoi,* fails to mention that in France, questions of translation have been center-stage for a long time, particularly since attacks on American scientism and medicalization in psychoanalysis not only have become a major intellectual enter-

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prise, but have been the reason for a number of institutional splits. Could it be that Bettelheim chose to publish in *The New Yorker* precisely because his audience there would hail as "new" what to psychoanalysts and other intellectuals is old-hat?

This is not to denigrate what Bettelheim has done, although this well-intentioned little book could have been so much more, given Bettelheim's knowledge and stature. As it is, it ends up being little more than another addition to current Freudiana—to the exposés of psychoanalysts from C. G. Jung's relation to Sabina Spielrein to Janet Malcolm's *Psychoanalysis: The Impossible Profession,* from Mary Balmary's *Psychoanalyzing Psychoanalysis* to the rewriting of history by a number of Lacanians. For both Freud and man's soul deserve a fuller and more serious treatment.

**EDITH KURZWEIL**

## TIMERMAN'S HALL OF MIRRORS

**THE LONGEST WAR: ISRAEL IN LEBANON. By Jacobo Timerman.** Translated from the Spanish by Miguel Acoca. Alfred A. Knopf. $11.95.

No previous war in the Middle East has raised so many questions concerning the reliability, intellectual honesty, and professionalism of the mass media as Israel's invasion of Lebanon. The grossly inflated casualty figures, the wild exaggeration of the extent of destruction against the background of an ongoing seven-year civil war, the sensation-mongering, the scandalous disregard for truth and historical perspective, the invention of imaginary war crimes, and the absurd charges of "genocide" against Israel are now a matter of record. The liberties taken by Western journalists with facts, logic, and professional norms of objectivity during this war are not, however, an incidental by-

Author's Note: This review was written before the results of the current commission were known. The boldly independent findings of that body, and their implementation by the government, underline just how little Mr. Timerman has really understood about the workings of Israeli democracy.

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product of the Arab-Israeli conflict but have become deeply enmeshed in our perceptions and images of events as they actually take place. I make this point because Jacobo Timerman himself is an experienced, professional journalist who has opted in this book to play fast and loose with the facts in a way that is astonishing for a man conscious of the way that the outside world has seized on false analogies to judge Israel's motives and actions. Mr. Timerman recognizes the absurdity of the accusation that the Israelis behaved like Nazis in Lebanon, and he states clearly enough that "to speak of a Palestinian genocide, of a Palestinian Holocaust, to compare Beirut with Stalingrad or with the Warsaw Ghetto will move no one." But his own book, an impassioned, angry, and indignant indictment of Israel's invasion (which he oversimplistically personifies as "General Sharon's War") is constantly marred by analogies, no less false, drawn from his previous experiences as a prisoner of the Argentinian military junta. Even worse, for a report that purports to be about the war in Lebanon, he has based his conclusions on the flimsiest of evidence culled from a very brief guided tour in July 1982 of Tyre and Sidon—that is, when he is not busy quoting in a highly selective manner from correspondents of the *Jerusalem Post* to bolster his case.

From his own account it is apparent that Mr. Timerman arrived in South Lebanon with a preconceived idea in his head that all the Lebanese hated the Israelis for invading their country, notwithstanding the anarchy and chaos, violence and bloodshed that had caused more than one hundred thousand casualties—none of which had troubled our intrepid investigator any more than they had unduly disturbed most Western journalists. For the distinguished author of *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number* (an account of his incarceration by the Argentine authorities) intuitively "knows" that "what a cordial and pleasant Lebanese is saying is contradicted by what I see expressed in his eyes." Mr. Timerman "knows" that the Lebanese who greet him and other visitors with shouts of "Shalom!" do so out of fear, and he, the "prisoner without a name," will never fraternize "with those I have subdued by force." The sentiment may be uplifting, even noble, but as with so much else in this book, it neither corresponds with the facts nor does it indicate a glimmer of insight into the realities of Lebanon. Most Lebanese (and not only the Christian forces) understood much better than

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Mr. Timerman that the invasion had liberated them from a PLO reign of terror and an oppressive burden that they were incapable of removing by their own efforts. They may want the Israelis out of their country (along with the Syrians and the Palestinians) but they are certainly well aware that without the invasion, with its inevitable though tragic overspill of destruction, they would have had no chance to regain their sovereignty, freedom, and independence.

The curious truth about this book remains, however, that Mr. Timerman is not really interested in Lebanon or in the Lebanese any more than he is concerned that Israel's northern settlements are no longer in range of the terrorist bases and training camps of the PLO and their accumulated stocks of Soviet weaponry. For to go into such trifling details, to acknowledge that Israel had a real security problem, that Lebanon had already *de facto* lost its sovereignty, and that any government in a similar position to that of the Israelis would probably have acted similarly—might seem to justify "General Sharon's War." That in turn would undermine Timerman's basic thesis—that the invasion was an "infamy" and that its architects "have made the Jewish people lose their moral tradition, their proper place in history." Such sweeping judgments are characteristic of a book that constantly judges Israel against impossible moral standards in the name of a Diaspora Judaism that never had to confront the dilemmas of the use of power in the real world.

Having discovered in Israeli Jews "a capacity for cruelty that I had never believed possible," and convinced that only the Diaspora has "maintained the values of our moral and cultural traditions—those values now trampled on here by intolerance and Israeli nationalism," Timerman calls on a world Jewish tribunal to pass judgment on Begin, Sharon, Eitan, and "the entire general staff of the Israeli armed forces." This is certainly a strange call for a self-professed Zionist who throughout the book poses as an *insider,* adopting the royal "we" at every opportunity—"we Israelis" did this and "we" conquered that, to the point that the unsuspecting reader might forget that this self-appointed expert has only been in the country for three years and has yet to learn Hebrew. Modesty, humility, and respect for facts are not, however, Mr. Timerman's strong points, for his self-confessed ignorance of Hebrew "is no problem," least of all in generalizing about the Israeli psyche or about the abnormality, alienation,

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and deformity that has allegedly overtaken daily life in Israel. Thus, he writes: "Many of us, surely a majority of Israelis, want the Palestinians to vanish physically from this region, want them banished from our presence." The evidence for this and similar statements is apparently derived from the tangle of obsessions, phantoms, and terrors in Timerman's own mind, which "we Israelis" all share. Having confused the nation with his own tormented and admittedly outsize ego, the author can indulge freely in uncontrolled psychologizing: "I fear that in our collective subconscious, we may not be wholly repelled by the possibility of a Palestinian genocide."

Nor does Mr. Begin escape the author's highly developed psychiatric intuition. "It is my belief that he is unbalanced," Timerman declares, wondering whether he, as a private citizen, should file an insanity suit or whether qualified Israeli psychiatrists should demand a clinical investigation. If Mr. Begin, a terrorist and "a disgrace to his people" (to be fair, Arafat is similarly labeled), is transparently "hysterical" and Mr. Sharon is a dangerously irrational, ruthless military dictator pursuing a messianic concept of geopolitics, what disturbs Mr. Timerman far more is that they have apparently sucked the whole nation into a collective sickness of paranoid delusion. On the one hand Begin has returned Israel to the ghetto, while General Sharon is busy turning it into a modern Sparta. Mr. Timerman evidently has some conceptual problems in analyzing this ghettoized Sparta since the analogies fall thick and fast without any obvious unity or coherence. Thus at times Israel reminds him of the Peronist collective madness, of semifascist Chile and Uruguay after 1972, of Argentina after 1976 (which released him thanks largely to Israel's efforts); at other times he wants to vomit for "This is South Africa." No less categorical and unilluminating is the flat assertion that "becoming the Prussia of the Middle East is now our manifest destiny." Yet Mr. Timerman claims to be upset that his fellow Israelis are reluctant to bandy about so flippantly words like *fascist* and *totalitarian*, which come so readily to his own mind as he gropes for a way of understanding Israeli reality. By his own admission, Israel has an independent judiciary, a free press, a free parliament, political parties, ideological pluralism, a free academic life, and an independent labor movement—none of which are considered to be normal features of fascist, totalitarian regimes.

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To get round such trifles, Mr. Timerman is forced to talk about the undemocratic use by Mr. Begin's government of "a merely circumstantial majority"; to insult Israel's Sephardic majority on the grounds that he has "seen their counterparts in Argentina, solidly behind Peron even when the Leader was drowning them in alienation and in an economic crisis"; to deny that the Sephardim had ever been persecuted in Arab lands; to dismiss Israel's democratic opposition and its free press (from which he culled much of his information); and to denounce the entire nation for being incapable "of recognizing the high degree of criminality in their army's campaign against the Palestinian people."

How empty these accusations really are can be seen by a look at Mr. Timerman's postscript on "The Massacre," whose level of accuracy aptly sums up the book. Here, the author claims that there was scarcely any reaction in Israel to what happened in Sabra and Shatilla, that he had to rely on the BBC for reliable information, and that "all of us realized it had been organized by our army." (Did Timerman take a poll, was he even in Israel at the time?) Not content with these pathetic distortions, he attacks the integrity of the Israeli journalist Zeev Schiff for going to the top in Israel to try and get the massacres halted rather than running to the international press (is that what Timerman would have done?), and then to cap it all he dismisses the September 25 rally of four hundred thousand Israelis in Tel Aviv in a derisory footnote: "The crowd was almost entirely composed of the ineffectual minority that has always opposed the Begin government. I believe that a majority of the people at the rally had been supporters of the invasion up to the time of the massacre."

This concluding postscript is not merely insensitive and wrongheaded, not merely an insult to the people of Israel in whose name Timerman purports to speak, but it shows how little the author really understands about the democracy whose soul he wishes to save. For unlike the Americans during the Vietnam War, the British during Suez, or the French at the time of the Algerian war, the Israeli public made their protest immediately, in the midst of a *victorious* war, in spite of the real and constant threat to their survival from bordering nations and terrorists who have yet to renounce their aim of eliminating Israel as an independent state. Where else, in such a situation, can Timerman point to soldiers and officers at the front questioning their orders in the midst of combat, feeling moral responsibility for the de-

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struction around them, risking their lives so as not to harm the innocent? Israeli public opinion did not need Mr. Timerman's book to pressure the government into appointing a Commission of Inquiry into the Beirut massacre committed not by the Israeli Army but by the Christian Phalangists against fellow Arabs—another trifle that the author fails to mention. Yet this same public is depicted by Timerman as swollen with hubris and patriotic braggadocio, intoxicated into a drunken stupor by official manipulation and a lying, cowardly press. (The Israeli press, it should be pointed out, was quite remorseless in its exposure of the government's evasions in the aftermath of the Beirut massacre.)

Timerman's cavalier disregard for facts, his comic-tragic posturing and his remoteness from Israeli reality make his account of the war in Lebanon highly suspect and at times frankly nauseating. Yet even this distorting hall of mirrors has its poignant moments—a kind of anguished lyricism and flashes of political insight that are scattered throughout the book, need to be separated from the overweening sentimentality and Olympian disdain that unfortunately color the author's tone. Thus Timerman is often moving and undoubtedly sincere in his evocation of the Palestinians' plight, he is not altogether wrong about General Sharon, and his personal distress at the turn of events in Israel is surely genuine. Anguish, rage, and tears for the dead are not, however, reliable indicators of truth, nor are they necessarily a testimony to sound political judgment, authenticity, and the reliability of the reporter's information. On all these counts, Timerman's book falls far short of minimal professional standards and is unlikely to convince even those sympathetic to his politics.

**ROBERT WISTRICH**

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